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# WORKS OF MARTIN LUTHER



# WORKS OF MARTIN LUTHER

TRANSLATED  
WITH  
INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES

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VOLUME V

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ON  
TRANSLATING:  
AN OPEN LETTER  
1530



## INTRODUCTION

The letter *On Translating* was one of the works composed during Luther's residence at Feste Coburg.<sup>1</sup> It was sent to Luther's friend, Wenzel Link, at Nuremberg, September 12, 1530, with the request that he give it to a publisher.<sup>2</sup> Link promptly furnished it with a brief foreword, dated September 15, in which he says that it has come into his hands "through a good friend."<sup>3</sup>

It is ostensibly an answer to two questions put to Luther by another "good friend." Who this friend is, is not known. He was probably invented by Luther himself to furnish an excuse for discussing, in the form of a letter, subjects that were then on his mind. Under the guise of a defense of his translation of Romans iii, 28, he writes on justification by faith and on the true meaning of good works, concluding the work with a brief treatment of the intercession of saints. In the course of the discussion he states and defends the methods that he had used in translating the Scriptures.

No other man in history has had a better right to speak on the subject of translating than Luther had. His German Bible is the greatest piece of translating that modern times have known. It has required more than a little courage to attempt to translate the present work into another language, out of Luther's German. The translator can only ask that critics of his translation will credit him with an effort to apply to Luther's writing the principles of translation that Luther here states and defends.

The text of the letter is found in Weimar Ed., XXX<sup>2</sup>, 632 ff. Erlangen Ed. LXV, 104 ff., St. Louis Ed., XIX, 968 ff. CLEMEN IV, 180 ff., Berlin Ed., VII, 26 ff. (With latter part omitted). The translation is from the text of Clemen.

CHARLES M. JACOBS

MOUNT AIRY  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction to the *Exhortation to the Clergy*, Vol. IV, p. 327 f., this edition.

<sup>2</sup> ENDERS, viii, 257.

<sup>3</sup> Weimar Ed. XXX<sup>2</sup>, 632.

## ON TRANSLATING: AN OPEN LETTER

1530

To the honorable N., my esteemed Lord and friend.

Grace and peace in Christ, honorable dear sir and friend.

Two  
Questions

Rom.  
3:28

I have received your letter with the two questions, or inquiries, to which you ask my reply. First, Why in translating the words of Paul, in the third chapter of Romans, *Arbitramur, hominem justificari ex fide absque operibus*, I rendered them thus: "We hold that man is justified without the works of the law, only by faith"?<sup>1</sup> You tell me, besides, that the papists are making a tremendous fuss, because the word *sola*, "only," is not in Paul's text, and this addition of my own to God's Word is not to be tolerated. Second, Whether the departed saints pray for us, since we read that the angels do pray for us?

With reference to the first question, you may give the papists the following answer, if you like.

Answering  
the  
Papists

First, If I, Dr. Luther, could have expected that all the papists together would be able to translate a single chapter of the Scriptures correctly and well, I should certainly have mustered up enough humility to invite their aid and assistance in putting the New Testament into German. But because I knew,—and still see with my own eyes,—that none of them knows how to translate or to speak German, I spared them and myself that trouble. It is evident, indeed, that from my translating and my German they are learning to speak and write German, and so are stealing my language, of which they had little knowledge before. They do not thank me for this, however, and prefer to use it against me. But I readily grant them this, for it is a feather in my cap<sup>2</sup> that I have taught my ungrateful pupils, even my enemies, how to speak.

<sup>1</sup> The point of the criticism is that Luther has inserted the word "only," which does not appear in the original text.

<sup>2</sup> *Es thut mir doch sanfft.*

Second, You may say that I translated the New Testament to the best of my ability and according to my conscience. I have compelled no one to read it, but have left that free, and did the work only as a service to those who could not do it better. No one is forbidden to do a better piece of work. If anyone does not want to read it, he can let it alone. I neither ask anybody to read it nor praise anyone who does so. It is my Testament and my translation, and it shall continue to be mine. If I have made some mistakes in it,—though I am not conscious of any and would be most unwilling to give a single letter a wrong translation intentionally,—I will not suffer the papists to be the judges. Their ears are still too long and their hee-haws too weak, for them to criticize my translating. I know very well, and they know even less than the miller's beast,<sup>1</sup> how much knowledge, work, reason and understanding is required in a good translator; they have never tried it.

There is a saying, "He who builds along the road has many masters." That is the way with me. Those who have never been able to speak rightly, to say nothing of translating, have all at once become my masters and I must be the pupil of them all. If I were to have asked them how to put into German the first two words of Matthew's Gospel, *Liber generationis*,<sup>2</sup> none of them would have known how to say Quack! And now they sit in judgment on the whole work! Fine fellows! That is the way it was with St. Jerome when he translated the Bible. The whole world was his master. He was the only one who could do nothing at all, and people who were not equal to cleaning his shoes condemned the good man's work. It takes patience to do a good deed for the world at large, for the world always wants to be Master Wise-man and must always be putting the bit under the horse's tail, directing everything, able to do nothing.

Matt.  
1: 1

I should like to see a papist who would come forward and translate an epistle of St. Paul or one of the prophets without making use of Luther's German translation. Then we should see a fine, beautiful German translation that we could praise!

Emser's  
Testament

<sup>1</sup> The ass.

<sup>2</sup> "The book of the generations."

We have seen the Dresden dirt-scrawler<sup>1</sup> who played the master to my New Testament. I shall not mention his name again in my books; he has his Judge, and besides he is well known. He admits that my German is sweet and good and saw that he could not improve on it; but, wanting to discredit it, he went to work and took my New Testament, almost word for word as I had written it, removed my introductions and explanations, and sold my New Testament under his own name. There! dear children, how it hurt me when his prince,<sup>2</sup> in a horrible preface, condemned Luther's New Testament and forbade the reading of it, but commanded that the scrawler's New Testament be read, though it was the same that Luther had made!

That no one may think I am lying, let him take the two Testaments, Luther's and the scrawler's, and compare them, and he will see who is the translator of both. He has patched and altered it in a few places, and though this does not please me, I can endure it. It does no special harm, so far as the text is concerned. For that reason, I have never wanted to write against it, but have had to laugh at the great wisdom that so terribly slandered and condemned and forbade my New Testament, because it was published under my name, but said that it must be read when it was published under another's name. What kind of virtue is it to heap slander and shame on another's book, and then steal it and publish it under one's own name, thus seeking praise and reputation by the slandered work of someone else?—this I leave to his Judge to discover. Meanwhile, I am satisfied and glad that my work, as St. Paul also claims, is furthered even by enemies, and Luther's book, without Luther's name and under his enemies' name, must be read. How could I avenge myself better?

But to return to the matter in hand! If your papist wants to make so much fuss about the word *sola*, "alone," tell him this: "Dr. Martin Luther will have it so, and says that

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome Emser. He died in 1527. In criticizing Luther's New Testament, he pointed out 1,400 errors. In the year of his death he published his own German New Testament in which he had closely followed Luther's version. Cf. KAWERAU, Hieron. Emser (1898), and Vol. III, pp. 277 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Duke George of Saxony. Cf. SMITH & JACOBS, Luther's Correspondence II, 426 f.



a papist and an ass are the same thing." *Sic volo, sic jubeo; sit pro ratione voluntas.*<sup>1</sup> We are not going to be the pupils and disciples of the papists, but their masters and judges. For once, also, we are going to be proud and brag with these ass-heads, and as St. Paul glories against his mad saints, so I shall glory against these asses of mine. Are they doctors? So am I. Are they learned? So am I. Are they preachers? So am I. Are they theologians? So am I. Are they disputants? So am I. Are they philosophers? So am I. Are they dialecticians? So am I. Are they lecturers? So am I. Do they write books? So do I.

I Cor.  
11:21ff

I will go further with my glorying. I can expound Psalms and Prophets; they cannot. I can translate; they cannot. I can read the Holy Scriptures; they cannot. I can pray; they cannot. To come to lower things! I can use their own dialectics<sup>2</sup> and philosophy better than all of them together; and besides, I know for sure that none of them understands their Aristotle. If there is a single one among them all who rightly understands one *Proemium* or chapter in Aristotle, I will let myself be tossed in a blanket.<sup>3</sup> I am not saying too much, for I was trained and practiced from my youth up in all their science and am well aware how deep and broad it is. They know very well, too, that I know all and can do all that they can. And yet these incurable fellows act toward me as though I were a visitor to the home of their science, who have only just arrived this morning and have never either seen or heard what they teach or what they can do. So gloriously do they boast of their science! They are teaching me what I knew by heart twenty years ago, so that to all their blatting and shouting I have to sing, with the harlot, "I've known for seven years that horseshoe-nails are iron."<sup>4</sup>

Let this be the answer to your first question. Please give these asses no other and no further answer to their blatting about the word *sola* than simply this: "Luther will have it

<sup>1</sup> "I will it; I command it; my will is reason enough."

<sup>2</sup> The art of debate, which was so highly developed in the later Middle Ages.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Luther's statement in the Open Letter to the Nobility, in this edition, Vol. II, p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Apparently a proverbial expression, the source of which is unknown.

so, and he is a doctor above all the doctors of the whole papacy." It shall stay at that! Henceforth I shall simply hold them in contempt and have them held in contempt, so long as they are the kind of people,—I should say, of asses,—that they are. There are shameless nincompoops among them who have never learned their own science of sophistry, Doctor Schmidt<sup>1</sup> and Doctor Dirty-nose,<sup>2</sup> and their likes. And yet they match themselves against me in this matter, which is not only far beyond the reach of sophistry, but as St. Paul says, above the whole world's wisdom and reason. Of course, an ass need not sing much; he is well enough known by his ears.

**Answering Friends** To you and to our people, however, I shall show why I chose to use the word *sola*, though in Romans iii, it was not *sola*, but *solum* or *tantum* that I used. So closely do the asses look at my text! However, I have used *sola fide* elsewhere, and I want both,—both *solum* and *sola*. I have constantly tried, in translating to produce a pure and clear German, and it has often happened that for two or three or four weeks we have sought and asked for a single word, and sometimes have not found it even then. In working at the book of Job,<sup>3</sup> Master Philip,<sup>4</sup> Aurogallus,<sup>5</sup> and I could sometimes scarcely finish three lines in four days. Now that it is translated and complete, anyone can read and criticize it, and one now runs his eyes over three or four pages and does not stumble once. But he is not aware of the humps and lumps that were there, where now he slips along as over a planed board, while we had to sweat and toil to get the humps and lumps out of the way so that one could slide over it so finely. It is good plowing when the field is cleaned up; but rooting out the woods and the stumps and getting the field ready,—that is work that nobody wants. There is no such thing as earning the world's thanks; God Himself can earn

<sup>1</sup> Johannes Faber of Leutkirch (1478-1541). See PRE<sup>3</sup> and Cath. Enc.

<sup>2</sup> Luther's name for Johannes Cochlaeus (1479-1552). See PRE<sup>3</sup> & Cath. Enc.

<sup>3</sup> On Luther's difficulties with Job, see his letter to Spalatin, February 23, 1524, Enders iv, 299; SMITH & JACOBS, Luther's Correspondence II, 221f.; also his Preface to the Book of Job, Vol. VI of this edition.

<sup>4</sup> Melancthon.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Aurogallus (1490-1543) was teaching Hebrew at Wittenberg after 1521. He was one of Luther's chief assistants in translating the Old Testament.

no thanks from it with the sun, with heaven and earth, or even with His own Son's death. It is just the world, and stays the world, in the devil's name, because it does not will to be anything else.

Here, in Romans iii, I know right well that the word *solum* was not in the Greek or Latin text and had no need of the papists to teach me that. It is a fact that these four letters *s-o-l-a* are not there, and at these letters the asses-heads stare, like a cow at a new door. At the same time they do not see that the sense of them is there and that the word belongs there if the translation is to be clear and strong. I wanted to speak German, not Latin or Greek, since I had undertaken to speak German in the translation. But it is the nature of our German language that in speaking of two things, one of which is admitted and the other denied, we use the word "only" along with the word "not" or "no." So we say, "The farmer brings only grain and no money"; "No, I have no money now, but only grain"; "I have only eaten and not drunk"; "Did you only write it, and not read it over?" There are innumerable cases of this kind in daily use.

In all these phrases it is the German usage, even though it is not the Latin or Greek usage, and it is the way of the German language to add the word "only," in order that the word "not" or "no" may be more complete and clearer. To be sure, I can also say, "The farmer brings grain and no money," but the words "no money" do not sound as full and clear as if I were to say, "The farmer brings only grain and no money." Here the word "only" helps the word "no" so much that it becomes a complete, clear, German phrase.

German  
Usage

We must not, like these asses, ask the Latin letters how we are to speak German; but we must ask the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace about this, and look them in the mouth to see how they speak, and afterwards do our translating. That way they understand it and mark that one is speaking German to them.

For example, Christ says, *Ex abundantia cordis*  
Vol. V—2.

Matt.  
12:34

os loquitur. If I am to follow the asses, they will lay the letters before me and translate thus: "Out of the surplus of the heart, the mouth speaketh." Tell me, is that German? What German understands that? What kind of thing is "surplus of the heart?" No German can say that, unless, perhaps, he wanted to say that someone had too large a heart or too much heart, though even that is not right. "Surplus of the heart" is not German, any more than is "surplus of the house," "surplus of the stove," "surplus of the bank." But the mother in the home and the common man say, "What fills the heart overflows the mouth."<sup>1</sup> That is speaking good German, the kind that I have tried for and, unfortunately, have not always reached or hit upon; for the Latin letters are a great hindrance to good German speech.

Matt.  
26:8

Mark  
14:4

Thus, for example, Judas the traitor says, in Matthew xxvi, *Ut quid perditio haec?* and in Mark xiv, *Ut quid perditio ista unguenti facta est?* If I am to follow these asses of literalists, I must translate that: "Why has this loss of the ointment happened?" But what kind of German is that? What German says, "Loss of the ointment has happened"? If he understands that at all, he thinks that the ointment is lost, and must be looked for and found again, though even that is obscure and uncertain. Now if that is good German, why do they not come out and make us a fine, pretty, new German Testament like that, and let Luther's Testament lie? I believe they would then reveal their knowledge! But a German man says, "Why this waste?" or "Why this loss? The ointment is ruined."<sup>2</sup> That is good German, from which it is understood that Magdalen wasted the ointment that she poured out, and did damage. That was what Judas meant; he thought he knew a better way to dispose of it.

Luke  
1:28

Again, when the angel greets Mary, he says, "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord be with thee!" Up to now that has been put into bad German, because the translation has followed the Latin literally. Tell me whether that is good

<sup>1</sup>Wes das hertz vol ist, des gehet der mund über.

<sup>2</sup>Was soll doch solcher unrath? or Was soll doch solcher schade. Nein, est ist schade umb der salbe.

German! When does a German say, "You are full of grace"? What German understands what it is to be "full of grace"? He must think of a keg full of beer or a purse full of money. Therefore, I have translated it "Thou gracious one,"<sup>1</sup> so that a German can think his way to what the angel meant by his greeting. Here, however, the papists will go crazy about me, because I have corrupted the *Angelic Salutation*,<sup>2</sup> though I have not yet hit upon the best German rendering for it. Suppose I were to take the best German, and translate the salutation thus: "Hail, dear Mary,"<sup>3</sup> for that is what the angel wanted to say, and what he would have said, if he had wanted to salute her in German. Suppose I had done that! I believe that they would have hanged themselves out of great devotion to the dear Virgin Mary, because I had thus destroyed the salutation.

But what do I care if they rage or rave? I shall not prevent them from translating as they please; but I also shall translate, not as they please, but as I please. If there is anyone who will not have it, let him let it alone and keep his criticism to himself, for I shall neither see nor hear it. They need bear no responsibility and give no account for my translating. Listen, well, to this! I shall say, "gracious Mary" and "dear Mary," and let them say "Mary full of grace." One who knows German knows very well what a tender, fine word that is: the dear Mary, the dear God, the dear emperor, the dear prince, the dear man, the dear child. I do not know whether this word "dear" can be said in Latin or other languages so tenderly that it rings through the heart,<sup>4</sup> by all the senses, as it does in our language.

I believe that St. Luke, a master of the Greek and Hebrew tongues, wanted to render the Hebrew word that the angel used and make its meaning clear by the Greek *kecharitomenē*; and I think that the angel Gabriel spoke with Mary as he spoke with Daniel, when he called him *H a m u -*

Dan.  
9:23

<sup>1</sup> *Du holdselige*, cf. Weizsäcker's *Begnädigte* and Moffett's "God favored one!"

<sup>2</sup> The Ave Maria.

<sup>3</sup> There is no English equivalent for Luther's *Gott grüsse dich, du liebe Maria*, which is altogether informal.

<sup>4</sup> *Das also dringe und klinge ynns hertz.*

doth and Ish hamudoth, *vir desidiorum*,<sup>1</sup> that "Dear Daniel"; for that is Gabriel's way of speaking as we see in Daniel. Now if I were to translate the angel's words literally by the asses' science, I should have to say, "Daniel, thou man of desires."<sup>2</sup> That would be pretty German! A German hears, indeed, that *Lüste* and *Begierung* are German words, though not pure German words, for *Lust* and *Begier* would be better. But when the words are thus put together in the phrase "man of desires," no German knows what is said. He thinks, perhaps, that Daniel was full of evil desires. That is fine translating! Therefore, I must let the literal words go and seek to learn how the German says what the Hebrew means by *Ish Hamudoth*. Then I find that the German says, "Dear Daniel," "Dear Mary," or "gracious maid," "pretty maiden," "gentle girl." A translator must have a great store of words, so that they may be on hand when one word does not fit in every place.

And why shall I speak much or long about translating? If I were to tell the reasons for all my words and the ideas that were back of their use, I should need a year to write it. I have learned by experience what an art and what labor translating is; therefore I will suffer no papal ass or mule to be my judge or critic, for they have never tried it. He who will none of my translating, may let it alone; if anyone dislikes it or criticizes it without my knowledge and consent, the devil repay him! If it is to be criticized, I shall do it myself; if I do not do it, then let them leave my translation in peace, and let each of them make for himself one that suits him; I bid him good-bye.

Luther's  
Conscience  
Clear

This I can testify with a good conscience,—I have been faithful and diligent to the utmost in this work and have never had a false thought.<sup>3</sup> I have not taken a single heller for it, or sought one, or made one by it. Nor have I had any intention to win honor by it,—that God, my Lord, knows,—but I have done it as a service to the dear Christians and

<sup>1</sup> English A. V. & R. V., "Greatly beloved."

<sup>2</sup> Daniel, du man der begierungen, oder, Daniel, du man der luste.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. Never any purpose to falsify.

to the honor of One who sitteth above, who blesses me so much every hour of my life that, if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, I still should not deserve to live a single hour or have a sound eye. All that I am and have is of His grace and mercy, nay, of His dear blood and His bitter sweat. Therefore, God willing, all of it shall serve to His honor, joyfully and sincerely. Scrawlers and papal asses may abuse me, but pious Christians and Christ, their Lord, praise me! and I am repaid all too richly, if only one single Christian recognizes me as a faithful workman. I care nothing for the papal asses; they are not worthy to recognize my work, and it would grieve me to the bottom of my heart, if they praised me. Their abuse is my highest glory and honor. Still, I would be a doctor, nay, a wonderful doctor; and that name they shall not take from me till the Last Day, that I know for sure.

On the other hand, I have not disregarded literal meanings too freely, but with my helpers, I have been very careful to see that when a passage is important, I have kept the literal meaning, and not departed freely from it. For example, in John vi, Christ says, "Him hath God the Father sealed." It would have been better German to say, "On him hath God the Father put His mark," or "It is he whom God the Father means." But I preferred to do violence to the German language, rather than depart from the words. Translating is not an art that everyone can practice, as the mad saints think; it requires a right pious, faithful, diligent, God-fearing, experienced, practiced heart. Therefore I hold that no false Christian, or sectarian,<sup>1</sup> can be a faithful translator. That is shown in the translation of the Prophets made at Worms.<sup>2</sup> It has been carefully done and approaches my German very closely; but Jews had a hand in it, and they do not show sufficient reverence for Christ; otherwise there is knowledge and care enough in it. So much for translating and the nature of the languages!

John  
6:21

<sup>1</sup> Rottengeist, "a radical."

<sup>2</sup> A translation of the prophets made by Ludwig Hätzer and Hans Denck and published at Worms, in 1527. The translators were antitrinitarians, which may account for Luther's belief that "Jews had a hand in it." On Hätzer and Denck see articles in Realencyk.

Rom.  
3:28

The  
Sense  
of the  
Passage

Rom. 4:2

Faith  
and  
Works

Gal. 2:16

Now, however, I was not only relying on the nature of the languages and following that when, in Romans iii, I inserted the word *solum*, "only," but the text itself and the sense of St. Paul demanded it and forced it upon me. He is dealing, in that passage, with the main point of Christian doctrine, viz., that we are justified by faith in Christ, without any works of the law, and he cuts away all works so completely, as even to say that the works of the law, though it is God's law and His Word, do not help us to righteousness. He cites Abraham as an example and says that he was justified so entirely without works, that even the highest work, which had then been newly commanded by God, before and above all other works, namely circumcision, did not help him to righteousness, but he was justified by faith, without circumcision and without any works at all. So he says, in Chapter iv, "If Abraham was justified by works, he may glory, but not before God." But when works are so completely cut away, the meaning of it must be that faith alone justifies, and one who would speak plainly and clearly about this cutting away of all works, must say, "Faith alone justifies us, and not works." The matter itself, and not the nature of the language only, compels this translation.

"Nay," say they, "it has an offensive sound, and the common people understand it to mean that they need do no good works." Dear sir, what are we to say? Is it not much more offensive that St. Paul himself does not say "faith alone," but makes it even plainer and goes to the very limit,<sup>1</sup> and says "Without the works of the law"? In Galatians i, also, and in many other places, he says "Not by the works of the law." A gloss<sup>2</sup> might be found for the words "faith alone," but the words "without the works of the law" are so plain and offensive and scandalous that they cannot be helped out by any gloss. How much rather might people learn not to do any good works, when they hear this preaching about works put in such plain, strong words: "No works," "without works," "not by works"! If it is not offensive when one preaches

<sup>1</sup>Schüttet wol grober eraus und stosset dem fass den boden aus.

<sup>2</sup>i.e. An interpretation distorting the real meaning.



“without works,” “no works,” “not by works,” why should it be offensive when one preaches, “by faith alone”?

And what is still more of an offense, St. Paul does not reject simple, common works, but “the works of the law.” From that it would be quite possible for someone to take offense and say that the law is condemned and accursed before God, and we ought to do nothing but evil, as the people said, in Romans iii, “Let us do evil that good may come.” This is the very thing that a spirit of discord<sup>1</sup> began to do in our time. Dear fellow, St. Paul and we wanted to give this offense, and we preach so strongly against works and insist on faith alone, for no other reason than that people may be offended and stumble and fall, in order that they may learn to know that they do not become righteous by good works, but only by Christ’s death and resurrection. Now if they cannot become righteous by the good works of the law, how much less shall they become righteous by bad works, and without the law! It does not follow, therefore, that because good works do not help, bad works do help; any more than it follows that because the sun cannot help a blind man to see, night and darkness must, therefore, help him to see.

Rom. 3:8

I am surprised that anyone can make such a fuss over a matter as evident as this. Tell me whether Christ’s death and resurrection are works of ours that we are to do, or not. They are not our works or the works of any law. Now it is only Christ’s death and resurrection that make us free from sin, and righteous, as Paul says in Romans iv, “He died for our sins and rose for our justification.” Tell me, further, what is the work by which we seize and hold Christ’s death and resurrection? It cannot be any external work, but only the eternal faith that is in the heart. Faith alone, nay, all alone, without any works, seizes this death and resurrection when it is preached by the Gospel. Why then, this raging and raving, this heretic making and burning at the stake, when the case is so plain and well founded, and it is proved that faith alone seizes Christ’s death and resurrection, without any works, and that His death and resurrection are our

Rom.  
4:25

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<sup>1</sup>Ein rotten geyst.

life and our righteousness? Since, then, it is so clear that only faith brings us, grasps for us, and gives us this life and righteousness, why should we not say so? It is no heresy that faith alone lays hold on Christ and gives life; and yet it must be heresy, if anyone says it. Are they not mad, foolish, and quite beside themselves? They admit that the thing is right, but brand the saying of the thing as wrong, though nothing can be both right and wrong at the same time.

I am not the only one or the first to say that faith alone justifies. Ambrose said it before me, and Augustine and many others; and if a man is going to read St. Paul and understand him, he will have to say the same thing and can say nothing else. Paul's words are too strong; they endure no works, none at all; and if it is not a work, it must be faith alone. How could it be such a fine, improving inoffensive doctrine, if people were taught that they might become righteous by works, beside faith? That would be as much as to say that it was not Christ's death alone that takes away our sins, but that our works, too, did something toward it; and it would be a fine honoring of Christ's death to say that our works helped it and could do that which He does, and that we were good and strong like Him. This is of the devil, who cannot leave the blood of Christ without abuse!

The matter itself demands, then, that it be said, "Faith alone justifies," and the nature of our German language teaches us to express it that way. I have the precedent of the holy Fathers also, and the peril of the people compels me to it, so that they may not continue to hang upon works and be without faith, and lose Christ, especially in these days, when they have been so long accustomed to works and have to be torn away from them by force. Therefore, it is not only right but highly necessary to speak out as plainly and fully as possible, and say, "Faith alone, without works, justifies." I am only sorry that I did not also add the words *alle* and *aller*, and say, "without any works of any laws," so that it would have been said fully and roundly. Therefore it shall stay in my New Testament and, though all

the papal asses become mad and foolish, they shall not get it out.

Let this be enough for the present. If God gives me grace, I shall have more to say about it in the tract *On Justification*.<sup>1</sup>

Coming to the second question,<sup>2</sup> whether the departed saints pray for us, I shall give you only a brief answer, for I have it in mind to publish a sermon on the angels,<sup>3</sup> in which, God willing! I shall treat this point further.

The  
Inter-  
cession  
of Saints

In the first place, you know that under the papacy it is taught that the saints in heaven do pray for us, though we cannot know this, since the Scriptures tell us no such thing. Not only so, but the saints have been made gods, so that they have to be our patrons, on whom we call, even though some of them have never existed. To each of these saints some special power and might have been ascribed. One has power over fire, another over water, another over pestilence, fever and all kinds of disease. Indeed it seems that God has to be idle and let the saints work and act in His stead. This abomination the papists themselves now feel, and they are quietly pulling in their pipes, and adorning themselves now with this teaching about the intercession of the saints. I shall defer this subject for the present; but that will not matter; I shall not forget it and allow their self-adornment to go unpunished.

In the second place, you know that there is not a single word of God commanding us to call on either angels or saints to intercede for us, and we have no example of it in the Scriptures. There we find that the angels spoke with the fathers and the prophets but none of these angels was asked to intercede for them. So Jacob, the father of them all, did not ask the angel, with whom he fought, for any intercession, but

Gen. 32:  
24ff.

<sup>1</sup> This tract was never completed. There are some notes for it extant. Cf. Weimar Ed., XXX<sup>2</sup>, 652 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Luther preached such a sermon at Coburg on the day of St. Michael and All Angels (September 29), 1530. It was published the next year, but has nothing to say about the intercession of saints. The sermon is in Weimar Ed. XXXII, 111 ff.

Rev.  
22:9

only took a blessing from him. On the contrary, we find, in the Apocalypse, that the angel would not allow himself to be worshiped by John. Thus the worship of saints shows itself to be a mere trumpery of men and an invention of their own, outside the Word of God and the Scriptures.

It is not proper, however, for us to undertake anything in the way of worship without God's Word, and one who does so is tempting God. Therefore it is not to be advised or endured that one should call upon the departed saints to intercede for him or should teach others to do it; but it is rather to be condemned and others are to be taught to avoid it. For this reason I, too, shall not advise it and so burden my conscience with other peoples' iniquities. It was exceedingly bitter for me to tear myself away from the worship of the saints, for I was steeped and fairly drowned in it. But the light of the Gospel is now so clear that henceforth no one has any excuse to remain in darkness. We all know very well what we ought to do.

Moreover, this is, in itself, a dangerous and offense-giving service, because people are easily accustomed to turning from Christ and quickly learn to put more confidence in the saints than in Christ Himself. Our nature is, in any case, all too prone to flee from God and Christ, and to trust in men; nay, it is exceedingly hard for one to learn to trust in God and Christ, though we have vowed<sup>1</sup> and are in duty bound to do so. Therefore this offense is not to be endured, so that weak and fleshly people may not begin an idolatry, against the First Commandment and against our baptism. Be satisfied to turn confidence and trust away from the saints, to Christ, both by teaching and practice. Even then there are difficulties and hindrances enough. There is no need to paint the devil on the door; he will be on hand.

Exod.  
20:5

Finally, we are certain that God is not angry with us, and that we are secure, even if we do not call upon the saints to intercede for us. He has never commanded it. He says that He is a jealous God, Who visits their iniquities on those who do not keep His commandments; but here there

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. in baptism. See below and Vol. I, pp. 68ff.

is no commandment and therefore no wrath to be feared. Since, then, there is on this side security and on that side great danger and offense against God's Word, why should we betake ourselves from security into danger, since we have no word of God to hold us, strengthen us, and rescue us in that need? For it is written, "He who gladly runs into danger shall perish therein," and God's command says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

Deut.  
6:16

"Nay," say they, "that way you condemn the whole Church," which has hitherto observed this practice everywhere." I reply: I know full well that the priests and monks seek this cloak for their abominations and want to put off on the Church the damage that they have done by their own neglect, so that if we say, "The Church does not err," we will be saying at the same time that they do not err, and thus they may not be accused of any lies or errors, since that is what the Church holds. Thus no pilgrimage can be wrong, however plainly the devil is along; no indulgence, however gross the lies that are told about it. In a word, there is nothing there but holiness. Therefore in answering them, you should say that this is not a question of who is and who is not condemned. They inject this foreign question in order to lead us away from our case. We are now discussing God's Word; what the Church is or does belongs elsewhere; the question here is, what is or is not God's Word; what is not God's Word does not make a Church.

We read that in the days of Elijah the prophet there was no public proclamation of God's Word and no worship of God in the whole people of Israel, as he says, "Lord, they have slain Thy prophets and overthrown Thine altars, and I am left all alone." Here King Ahab and others might have said, "Elijah, with such language you condemn the whole people of God." But at the same time God had preserved seven thousand. How, then? Do you not think that God can now preserve His own under the papacy, even though the priests and monks have been the devils' teachers in the

I Kings  
9:10

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiasticus 3: 26.

<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout this passage, *die Christenheit*.

Church and have gone to hell? Many children and young people have died in Christ; for even under Antichrist, Christ has with might preserved baptism, the bare text<sup>1</sup> of the Gospel in the pulpit, the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed, so as to preserve many of His Christians and thus preserve His Church; and He has said nothing about this to the devil's teachers.

And even though the Christians have done some bits of papal abomination, the papal asses have not proved by this that the Christians did it gladly; still less does it prove that the Christians did right. All Christians can err and sin, but God has taught them all to pray in the Lord's Prayer for forgiveness of sins, and has known well how to forgive the sins that they have had to commit unwillingly, unknowingly, and under compulsion of Antichrist, saying nothing about it to the priests and monks. But it can easily be proved that in all the world there has always been a great, secret murmuring and complaining against the clergy, as men who were not treating the Church aright, and the papal asses have valiantly withstood such murmuring with fire and sword, down to the present day. This murmuring proves how gladly the Christians have seen these abominations and how right they have been.

Nay, dear asses, come along and say that this is the teaching of the Church,—these stinking lies which you villains and traitors have imposed by force upon the Church and over which you archmurderers have slain many Christians. Every letter of every papal law shows that nothing is ever taught with the counsel or by the will of the Church. There is nothing there but *districte precipiendo mandamus*.<sup>2</sup> That has been their Holy Ghost. This tyranny the Church has had to endure; it has been robbed of the Sacrament and, by no fault of its own, it has been held in captivity.<sup>3</sup> And the asses would palm off this intolerable tyranny

<sup>1</sup> i. e. the text without corrupting glosses, or explanations.

<sup>2</sup> "We teach and strictly command." The phrase is common in papal bulls.

<sup>3</sup> This is the theme of *The Babylonian Captivity*, Vol. II, pp. 170 ff.

of theirs on us as a willing act of the Church and an example, and so adorn themselves.

But this is getting too long. Let this be answer enough to your questions this time; more another time. Pardon this long letter. Christ our Lord be with us all. Amen.

MARTIN LUTHER,

Your good friend.

The Wilderness,<sup>1</sup> October 8, 1530.

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<sup>1</sup> This manner of dating is common in Luther's Wartburg letters; it recurs in those written from Feste Coburg.





WHETHER SOLDIERS, TOO, CAN BE SAVED

(Ob Kriegsleute auch in seligem  
Stande sein können)

1526



## INTRODUCTION

The tract on the question *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved* was suggested to Luther by Asa von Kram,<sup>1</sup> a counsellor of Duke Ernst of Brunswick-Lüneberg. The suggestion was made when they met in Wittenberg immediately after the Peasants' War. It was renewed in January, 1526, when the two met again in Torgau.<sup>2</sup> In October, 1526, the work was finished.<sup>3</sup> It was published before January 1, 1527.

This tract is closely related to Luther's writings on the Peasants' War<sup>4</sup> and to those on government.<sup>5</sup> This whole group of writings should be read together, if Luther's views on the subjects here discussed are to be thoroughly understood.

Luther's view of war was that it is a necessary evil. It has a rightful place in the world, but only as a means for the repression of wrong; when used for that purpose, it is justified. He attempts to guard this doctrine against abuse by distinguishing between three kinds of war,—that of inferiors against superiors, which is never justified; that of equals against equals, which may be justified, but must never be war of aggression; and that of superiors against inferiors, which is simply an application of the police-power that belongs to the State. The classification of superiors, equals and inferiors is feudal and is based upon the distinctions which the feudal system made between overlords and vassals. It was on the basis of these views that Luther resisted the attempt to create a league of Protestant princes to defend the Reformation. Prior to the Diet of Augsburg, he maintained that any effort on the part of the Emperor to repress Lutheranism should be met with merely passive resistance, but any attempt by the Catholic princes to repress it might be resisted actively.<sup>6</sup>

The text of this tract is found in Weimar Ed., XIX, 623 ff., Erlangen Ed., XXII, 246 ff.; St. Louis Ed., X, 488 ff.; Berlin Ed., VII, 383 ff., CLEMEN III, 317 ff.

For Literature, see the Introductions in Weimar and Berlin Eds. and KARL HOLL, *Luther* (1923), pp. 267 ff.

CHARLES M. JACOBS

MOUNT AIRY  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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<sup>1</sup> See SMITH & JACOBS, *Luther's Correspondence*, II, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> See Letter of Dedication, below.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SMITH & JACOBS, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> In this edition, Vol. IV, pp. 219 ff.

<sup>5</sup> On Temporal Government. Vol. III, pp. 228 ff and Explanation of the LXXXII Psalm, Vol. IV, pp. 287 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. DE WETTE, III, 319; SMITH & JACOBS, *op. cit.* II, 435 ff.

TO THE  
WORSHIPFUL AND HONORABLE  
ASSA VON KRAM, KNIGHT,  
MY GRACIOUS LORD AND FRIEND,  
MARTIN LUTHER

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Letter of  
Dedication

Grace and peace in Christ, worshipful and honorable dear sir and friend. When you were recently at Wittenberg at the time of the Elector's entry, we talked of the conditions of the soldiers, and in the course of the conversation many points were raised touching matters of conscience. Thereupon you and others asked me to publish a written opinion on this subject, because there are many who are offended by this occupation. Some of them have doubts, others give themselves up so completely for lost that they inquire no longer about God, and cast soul and conscience to the winds. I myself have heard some of these fellows say that if they were to remember these things they could never go to war; as though war were such a great thing that we are not to think about God and the soul when war is afoot; and yet when we are in danger of death, that is the very time when we ought most to be mindful of God and the soul.

In order, then, that our best advice may be given to these weak and timid and doubting consciences, and that the heedless may receive better instruction, I complied with your request and promised this book. For if a man goes into battle with a good and well-instructed conscience, he fights well, since a good conscience never fails to make great courage and a bold heart; but when the heart is bold and the spirit confident, the fist is all the stronger, horse and man are brisker, everything turns out better, and all the chances better favor the victory which God then gives. On the other hand, if the conscience is timid and uncertain, then the heart

cannot be right bold. It is impossible for a bad conscience not to make men cowardly and fearful, as Moses says to his Jews, "If you are disobedient, God will give you a fearful heart, so that when you go out one way against your enemies, you shall be scattered seven ways, and have no good fortune." Then horse and man are lazy and unprepared, and lack vigor for the attack, and at last are defeated. As for the rude and heedless consciences in the company,—those who are called daredevils and foolhardy fellows,—with them everything goes at haphazard, whether they win or lose. For as it turns out for those who have good or bad consciences, so it turns out for these rude beasts, too, because they are in the army. Victory is not given on their account, for they are only the shells and not the true kernel of the army.

Deut.  
28:25

Accordingly, I now send you this opinion of mine, given according to the power that God has granted me, so that you and others who would like to go to war in such a way as not to lose God's favor and eternal life, may know how to arm and how to guide yourselves. God's grace be with you. Amen.

## THAT SOLDIERS, TOO, CAN BE SAVED

1526

**Pre-  
liminary  
Con-  
sidera-  
tions**

In the first place, a distinction must be made between an occupation and the man who is in it, between a work and the doer of it. An occupation or a work can be good and right in itself and yet be bad and wrong if the man in the occupation, or the doer of the work is not good and right, or does not do his duty rightly. The office of a judge is a precious and godly office, whether it be that of *Mundrichter* or that of *Faustrichter*,<sup>1</sup> whom we call executioner. But when the office is assumed by one to whom it has not been committed or by one who, though it has been committed to him, discharges its duties with a view to securing money or favor, then it is no longer right or good. The married state, also, is precious and godly, but there is many a rascal and knave in it. It is just the same way with the occupation or work of the soldier; in itself it is right and godly, but we must see to it that the persons who are in the occupation and who do the work are the right kind of persons, godly and upright. This we shall hear.

**The Question to be Discussed: Can a Christian be a Soldier?**

In the second place, I would have it understood that I am not speaking, this time, about the righteousness that makes men good in the sight of God. For the only thing that can do that is faith in Jesus Christ, granted and given us by the grace of God alone, without any works or merits of our own, as I have written and taught so often and so much in other places; but I am speaking here about external righteousness which is to be sought in offices and works. In other words, to put it plainly, I am dealing here with such questions as these,—whether the Christian faith, by which we are accounted righteous before God can tolerate, alongside it, that I be a soldier, go to war and slay and stab, rob

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<sup>1</sup>The *Mundrichter* is the judge who pronounces the sentence; the *Faustrichter* is the one who executes it.

and burn, as one does to enemies, by military law, in times of war; whether this work is sin or wrong, about which one should have scruples before God; or whether a Christian must only do good and love, and kill no one, nor do anyone any harm. I say that this office or work, even though it were godly and right, can nevertheless become bad and wrong, if the person engaged in it is wrong and bad.

In the third place, it is not my intention to explain here at length how the occupation and work of a soldier is in itself right and godly, because I have written quite enough about that in the book *On Temporal Government*.<sup>1</sup> For I might boast here that, since the time of the Apostles, the temporal sword and temporal government have never been so clearly described or so highly praised as by me. This even my enemies must admit, but the reward and honorable thanks that I have earned by it are to have my doctrine called seditious, and condemned as resistance to rulers. God be praised for that! For the very fact that the sword has been instituted of God to punish the evil and protect the good and preserve peace, (Romans xiii, I Peter iii) is proof, powerful and sufficient, that fighting and slaying and the other things that war-times and martial law bring with them, have been instituted by God. What else is war than the punishment of wrong and evil? Why does anyone go to war, except because he desires peace and obedience?

Rom. 13:  
1ff.

I Pet. 2:  
13ff.

What  
is War?

Although slaying and robbing do not seem to be a work of love, and therefore a simple man thinks it not a Christian thing to do, yet in truth even this is a work of love. By way of illustration, a good physician, when a disease is so bad and so great that he has to cut off a hand, foot, ear, eye, or let it decay, does so, in order to save the body. Looked at from the point of view of the member that he cuts off, he seems a cruel and merciless man; but looked at from the point of view of the body, which he intends to save, it turns out that he is a fine and true man and does a work that is good and Christian, as far as it goes. In the same way, when I think of the office of soldier, how it punishes the

<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Vol. III, pp. 228 ff.

wicked, slays the unjust, and creates so much misery, it seems an unchristian work and entirely contrary to Christian love; but if I think of how it protects the good and keeps and preserves house and home, wife and child, property and honor and peace, then it appears how precious and godly this work is, and I observe that it cuts off a leg or a hand, so that the whole body may not perish. For if the sword were not on guard to preserve peace, everything in the world must go to ruin because of lack of peace. Therefore, such a war is only a little, brief lack of peace that prevents an everlasting and immeasurable lack of peace, a small misfortune that prevents a great misfortune.

Justification

Rom.  
13:1

When men write about war, then, and say that it is a great plague, that is all true; but they should also see how great the plague is that it prevents. If people were good, and glad to keep peace, war would be the greatest plague on earth; but what are you going to do with the fact that people will not keep peace, but rob, steal, kill, outrage women and children, and take away property and honor? The small lack of peace, called war, or the sword, must set a check upon this universal, world-wide lack of peace, before which no one could stand. Therefore God honors the sword so highly that He calls it His own ordinance, and will not have men say or imagine that they have invented it or instituted it. For the hand that wields this sword and slays with it is then no more man's hand, but God's, and it is not man, but God, who hangs, tortures, beheads, slays and fights. All these are His works and His judgments. In a word, in thinking of the soldier's office, we must not have regard to the slaying, burning, smiting, seizing, etc. That is what the narrow, simple eyes of children do, when they see in the physician only a man who cuts off hands or saws off legs, but do not see that he does it to save the whole body. So, too, we must look at the office of the soldier, or the sword, with grown-up eyes, and see why it slays and acts so cruelly. Then it will prove itself to be an office that, in itself, is godly, as needful and useful to the world as eating and drinking or any other work.



There are some who abuse this office, and slay and smite needlessly, for no other reason than because they want to; but that is the fault of the persons, not of the office, for where is there an office or a work or any other thing so good that self-willed, wicked people do not abuse it? They are like crazy physicians who would cut off a sound hand, without necessity and just because they wanted to; nay, they are a part of that universal lack of peace which must be prevented by right war and sword, and forced into peace. It always happens, and always has happened that those who begin war unnecessarily are beaten, for they cannot finally escape God's judgment, that is, His sword; it finds them and strikes them at last, as happened to the peasants in the revolt.<sup>1</sup>

Luke  
3:1

In confirmation of this, we have the greatest preacher and teacher, next to Christ, namely, John the Baptist (Luke iii) who, when soldiers came to him and asked what they should do, did not condemn their occupation and did not bid them desist from it, but rather confirmed it and said, "Be content with your wages and do no one violence or wrong." Thus he praised the profession of arms and, at the same time, forbade the abuse of it. For the abuse does not affect the office. Thus Christ, when He stood before Pilate, admitted that war was not wrong, when He said, "Were I king of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be handed over to the Jews." Here, too, belong all the stories of war in Old Testament, the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, David, and all the Kings in the people of Israel. If war and the occupation of arms were in itself wrong and displeasing to God, we should have to condemn Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and all the rest of the holy fathers, kings, and princes, who served God in this occupation and are of high renown in Scripture because of this work. All this is well-known to all who have read even a little in Holy Scripture, and there is no need to offer further proof of it here.

War  
Justified  
in Scrip-  
ture

John  
18:36

Someone, perhaps, would say at this point that the case

<sup>1</sup> Of 1525, see Vol. IV, pp. 219 ff.

was different with the holy fathers, because God had separated them from the other nations by choosing them as His people, and had bidden them fight; and that, for this reason, their example was insufficient for a Christian under the New Testament, since they had God's command and fought in obedience to God, while we have no command to fight, but rather to suffer, and put up with everything. This objection is answered clearly enough by St. Peter and St. Paul, both of whom command obedience to worldly ordinances and to the commandments of worldly rulers even under the New Testament, and we have heard above that St. John the Baptist taught soldiers, as a Christian teacher, and yet allowed them to remain soldiers, only so that they did not abuse their occupation, did no one violence or wrong, and were content with their wages. Therefore, even under the New Testament, the sword is established by God's word and commandment, and those who use it aright and fight obediently, serve God thereby and are obedient to His Word.

Think for yourself! If we were to give way on this point and admit that war was wrong in itself, we would then have to give way on all other points and allow that the use of the sword was entirely wrong. For if the sword is a wrong thing when used for fighting, it would also be a wrong thing when used for punishing evil-doers and keeping the peace; in a word everything it does would have to be wrong. For what is just war, except the punishment of evil-doers and the maintenance of peace? If one punishes a thief or a murderer or an adulterer, that is punishment inflicted on a single evil-doer; but in a just war one punishes at one time a whole great crowd of evil-doers, who are doing harm in proportion to the size of the crowd. If, therefore, one work of the sword is good and right, they are all right and good, for the sword is a sword and not a fox-tail,<sup>1</sup> and it is called, in Romans xiii, "The wrath of God."

Rom.  
13:4

Matt.  
5:39

But in reply to their objection that Christians are not commanded to fight and that examples are not enough, because

<sup>1</sup> The use of the expression "fox-tail" for punishment that consists only in a gesture is not uncommon with Luther.

they have a teaching from Christ that they are not to resist evil, but suffer all things,—in reply to this I have made sufficient answer in my book *On Temporal Authority*.<sup>1</sup> For Christians, indeed, do not fight and have no worldly rulers among them. Their government is a spiritual government, and, according to the Spirit, they are subjects of no one but Christ. Nevertheless, so far as body and property are concerned, they are subject to worldly rulers and owe them obedience. If worldly rulers call on them to fight, then they ought to and must fight, and be obedient, not as Christians but as members of the state and obedient subjects, as regards the body and temporal possessions. Therefore, when they fight, they do it not for themselves or on their own account, but as a service and act of obedience to the rulers under whom they are, as St. Paul writes to Titus, "They shall obey the rulers." Tit. 3: 1

That is the sum and substance of it. The sword is in itself right and is a divine and useful ordinance, which God will have not despised, but feared, honored, and obeyed, on pain of vengeance, as Paul says, in Romans xiii. For He has established two kinds of government among men. The one is spiritual; it has no sword, but it has the Word, by means of which men are to become good and righteous, so that with this righteousness they may attain everlasting life. This righteousness He administers through the Word, which He has committed to the preachers. The other is worldly government, through the sword, which aims to keep peace among men, and this He rewards with temporal blessing. For He gives to rulers so much property, honor, and power, to be possessed by them above others, in order that they may serve Him by administering this righteousness. Thus God Himself is the founder, lord, master, protector, and rewarder of both kinds of righteousness. There is no human ordinance or authority in either, but each is altogether a divine thing.

Since, then, it is beyond doubt that the occupation<sup>2</sup> is,

Rom.  
13:4

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<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Vol. III, pp. 228 ff.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. Of a soldier.

Who  
Are to  
Fight?

in itself a right and godly thing, we will now discuss the persons who are in it and the use they make of their position; for it is most important to know who is to use this office and how he is to use it. And here enters the fact that when we try to set up fixed rules and laws for this matter, there arise so many cases and exceptions that it is very difficult, or even impossible, to decide everything accurately and equitably. This is the case with all laws; they can never be fixed so certainly and so justly that cases do not arise which deserve to be made exceptions. If the exceptions are not made, and the law is strictly followed, it would be the very greatest wrong; as the heathen Terence says, "The strictest law is the greatest wrong";<sup>1</sup> and Solomon also teaches in his Ecclesiastes, that we are not to be all too right, but at times to be unwise.

Ecc.  
7:16;  
10:1

By way of illustration: In the recent rebellion of the peasants,<sup>2</sup> there were some who were drawn into it against their will. These were especially people who were well-to-do, for the rebellion struck the rich, as well as the rulers, and it may fairly be assumed that no rich man favored the rebellion. At all events, there were some who had to go along without their own consent. Some, too, yielded to this compulsion, thinking that they could check the mad mob and with good counsel, hinder somewhat their wicked purpose and keep them from doing so much evil, thus rendering a service to themselves and to the rulers. Others, again, were drawn in by permission of their lords, whom they asked about it in advance; and there may have been other similar cases. For no one can imagine all of them, or comprise them all in the law.

Law  
and  
Equity

Here, then, stands the law and says, "All rebels are guilty of death and these three kinds of men were found among the rebellious crowd, in the very act of rebellion." What shall we do to them? If we are to allow no exceptions and let the law take its strict course, they must die just like the others, who had a guilty heart and will in their

<sup>1</sup>"Summum jus, summa injuria. Heautontimoroumenos IV, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Vol. IV, pp. 219 ff.

act of rebellion, although those of whom we are speaking had an innocent heart and a good will. Some of our knights<sup>1</sup> did this, especially to rich men, when they thought they could rob them, if they could say to them, "You, too, were in the crowd; you must go out."<sup>2</sup> In this way they have done great wrong to many people and shed innocent blood, made widows and orphans, and taken their property besides; and they are of the nobility. Yes, of the nobility! The excrement of the eagle can boast that it comes from the eagle's body<sup>3</sup> though it stinks and is useless; and so these men can also be of the nobility. We Germans are Germans, and stay Germans; that is, swine and senseless beasts. And so I say now that, in cases like those of the three kinds mentioned, the law ought to yield and justice take its place. For the law says dryly, "Rebellion is punishable with death, as *crimen laesae majestatis*, a sin against the rulers."<sup>4</sup> But justice says, "Yes, dear law, it is as you say; but it can happen that two men do like acts with unlike hearts and intentions." Judas, for example, kissed Christ in the garden; this was outwardly a good work; but his heart was bad and betrayed his Lord with the good work that Christ and His disciples did to one another at other times with a good heart. Again, Peter sat down by the fire with the servants of Annas and warmed himself with the godless, and that was not good. Now if the law were to be applied strictly, Judas would have to be a good man and Peter a rascal; but Judas' heart was bad and Peter's was good; therefore justice must, in this case, be mistress of the law.

Matt.  
26:49

Luke  
22:55

Therefore those who were among the rebels with good intentions justice not only acquits, but holds worthy of double grace. They are just like the pious Hushai, the Archite, who joined the rebellious Absalom and acted obediently, by David's orders, with the intention of helping David

<sup>1</sup> Junkerlein.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., To death.

<sup>3</sup> Luther's play on the words *Adel*, "nobility," and *Adeler* "eagle," is not translatable.

<sup>4</sup> "The crime of high treason." Under the Roman and feudal law, it was an offense against the person of the ruler.

II Sam. and checking Absalom, as it is all finely written in the second  
 15: 32ff book of Samuel xv and xvi. Outwardly considered, Hushai,  
 16: 16ff too, was a rebel, with Absalom, against David; but he  
 earned great praise and honor everlastingly before God and  
 all the world. If David had allowed this Hushai to be con-  
 demned as a rebel, it would have been just as praiseworthy  
 a deed as those which our princes and knightlets are now  
 doing to equally innocent people, nay, to people who have  
 deserved well.

This virtue, or wisdom, which can and must guide and moderate the severity of law according to cases, and which judges the same deed to be good or evil according to the difference of heart or intention,—this virtue is called in Greek *epieikeia*, in Latin *aequitas*; I call it *Billigkeit*.<sup>1</sup> For because law must be framed simply, in dry, short words, it cannot possibly embrace all the cases and the hindrances. Therefore, the judges and lords must be wise and pious in this matter and mete out reasonable justice, and let the law take its course, or set it aside, accordingly. The head of a household makes a law for his servants, telling them what they are to do on this day or that; there is the law, and the servant who does not keep it must take his punishment. Now one of them may be sick, or be otherwise hindered from keeping the law, by no fault of his own; then the law is suspended, and he would be a mad head of a house who would punish a servant for that kind of neglect of duty. In like manner, all laws that regulate men's actions must be subject to justice, their mistress, because of the many, innumerable, various accidents that can happen, and that no one can anticipate or set down.

Accordingly, we have the following to say of the persons who are affected by the law of war or who are occupied with war. First, War may be made by three kinds of people. An equal may make war against his equal, that is, of the two persons neither is the vassal or subject of the other, though the one may be less great or glorious or mighty than the

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<sup>1</sup> "Justice."

other. Or a superior may fight against his inferior. Or an inferior may fight against his superior. Let us take the third case. Here stands the law, and says, "No one shall fight or make war against his overlord; for a man owes his overlord obedience, honor and fear" (Romans xiii). If one chops over one's head, the chips fall in one's eyes, and as Solomon says, "He who throws stones in the air, upon his head they fall." That is the law in a nut-shell. God Himself has instituted it and men have accepted it, for it does not fit together that men shall both obey and resist, be subject and not put up with their lords.

Rom.  
13:1

Prov.  
26:27

But we have already said that justice ought to be mistress of law, and where circumstances demand, guide the law, or even command and permit men to act against it. Therefore the question here is whether it can be just, i.e., whether a case can arise in which one can act against this law, be disobedient to rulers and fight against them, depose them or put them in bonds.

Is There  
a Right  
of Revolution?

There is among us men a vice which is called *fraus*; that is, deception or trickery. If this vice of ours discovers that justice is superior to law, as has been said, then it becomes altogether against the law and seeks and hunts day and night for some way to bring itself to market under the name and appearance of justice and thus sell itself, so that the law comes to nothing and fraud becomes the sweet thing that does everything it ought to do. Therefore, there is a proverb which says, *Inventa lege, inventa est fraus legis*, "When a law starts, Mistress Fraud is soon on hand."

The heathen, because they knew nothing of God, did not know that temporal government is God's ordinance, for they held it as the good fortune and the deed of men and therefore they jumped right in here and thought that it was not only right, but also praiseworthy to depose, kill and drive out worthless and wicked rulers. Therefore, the Greeks, in public laws, promised jewels and presents to tyrannicides, that is, to those who stab or otherwise destroy a tyrant. The Romans in the days of their empire followed mightily after

this example and themselves killed almost the majority of their emperors, so that in that great empire, almost no emperor was ever slain by his enemies and yet few of them died in their beds a natural death. The people of Israel and Judah also slew and destroyed some of their kings.

But these examples are not enough for us, for we are not asking here what the heathen or the Jews have done, but what is the right and the just thing to do, not only before God in the spirit, but also in the divine external ordinance of temporal government. For if today or tomorrow a people rises up and deposes their lord or slays him,—well, that will happen, and the lords must expect it, if it is God's decree;—but it does not follow that for that reason it is a right and just act. I have never known a case of this kind that was just, and even now I cannot imagine one. The peasants in their rebellion alleged that the lords would not allow the Gospel to be preached and robbed the poor people, and, therefore that they must be overthrown; but I have answered this by saying that although the lords did wrong in this, it would not therefore be just or right to do wrong in return, that is, to be disobedient and destroy God's ordinance, which is not ours. On the contrary, we ought to suffer wrong and if prince or lord will not tolerate the Gospel, then we ought to go into another principedom where the Gospel is preached, as Christ says in Matthew x, "If they persecute you in one city flee into another."

Matt.  
10:23

It is just, to be sure, that if a prince, king, or lord goes crazy, he should be deposed and put under restraint, for he is not to be considered a man since his reason is gone. Yes, you say a raving tyrant is crazy, too, or is to be considered even worse than a madman, for he does much more harm. That answer puts me in a tight place, for such a statement makes a great appearance and seems to be in accord with justice. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that the cases of madmen and tyrants are not the same; for a madman can neither do nor tolerate anything reasonable, nor is there any hope for him because the light of reason has gone out. But a tyrant, however much of this kind of thing he does, knows



that he does wrong. He has his conscience and his knowledge, and there is hope that he may do better, allow himself to be instructed, and learn, and follow advice, none of which things can be hoped for in a crazy man, who is like a clod or a stone. Moreover, such conduct has a bad result or sets a bad example. If it is called right to murder or drive out tyrants, the thing grows and it becomes a common sign of self-will to call men tyrants who are not tyrants, and even to kill them if the mob takes a notion to do so. This the Roman histories show us. They killed many a fine emperor only because they did not like him or he did not do what they wanted, and did not let them be lords, and held them for their servants and monkeys as happened to Galba, Pertinax, Gordian, Alexander and others.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot pipe much to the mob. It goes mad too quickly, and it is better to take ten ells from it than to allow to it a hand-breadth, nay a finger's-breadth in such a case, and it is better that the tyrants do the wrong a hundred times than that they once do wrong to the tyrants. If wrong is to be suffered, then it is better to suffer it from the rulers than that the rulers suffer it from their subjects. For the mob has no moderation and knows none, and in every individual in it there stick more than five tyrants. Now it is better to suffer wrong from one tyrant, that is, from the ruler, than from unnumbered tyrants, that is, from the mob.

It is said that the Swiss, in earlier days, slew their overlords and made themselves free, and the Danes have recently driven out their king,<sup>2</sup> and the cause in both cases has been the intolerable tyranny which their subjects had to suffer; but I have said above that I am not discussing here what the heathens do or have done, or anything that resembles their examples and history, but what one ought to do and can do with a good conscience, so that one is safe and sure that the thing he does is not in itself wrong before God. For I know well enough and I have read in a few histories how

<sup>1</sup> All of these emperors were deposed in revolutions of the army; Galba in 69 A. D.; Pertinax 193; Gordian 244; Alexander 235.

<sup>2</sup> Christian II was driven out of Denmark in 1523, after ten years on the throne of the three Scandinavian kingdoms.

often subjects have slain or driven out their rulers as the Jews did and the Greeks and the Romans, and God has allowed it to happen and has allowed them to grow and increase in spite of it. But at last there has always been a terrible end to it, for the Jews were finally suppressed and dispersed by the Assyrians, the Greeks by King Philip, the Romans by the Goths and the Lombards, the Swiss have paid for it dearly with much blood and they are paying for it yet, and it is easy to see what the outcome will be. The Danes, too, are not yet through with the business. But I see no lasting government except where rulers are held in honor. An illustration is the Persians, the Tartars and more of those peoples, who not only maintained themselves against the Romans with all their power, but destroyed them and many other lands.

Rom.  
12:19

Matt.

7:1

Exod.

22:28

I Tim.

2:1ff.

My reason is this alone; namely, that God says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," and again, "Judge not." Besides, it is strictly and often forbidden in the Old Testament to curse rulers or speak evil of them, as in Exodus xxiii, "Thou shalt not curse the prince of thy people." Paul in I Timothy ii, teaches Christians to pray for rulers. Solomon teaches everywhere in his Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to obey the king and be subject to him. Now no one can deny that if subjects set themselves against their rulers, they revenge themselves and make themselves judges, which is not only against the ordinance and command of God, who will have judgment and vengeance belong to Him, but also against all natural law and justice. So it is said, "No one shall be his own judge," and again, "He who strikes back is wrong."

Here you will say, perhaps, "Yes, if everything is to be endured from the tyrants, you give them too much and their wickedness only becomes stronger and greater by such teaching. Is it to be endured then that every man's wife and child, body and goods, are to be in danger? Who can start any good thing if that is the way we are to live?" I reply: My teaching is not for you, if you will to do whatever you think good and whatever pleases you. Follow your own notion

and slay all your lords, and see what good it does you. My teaching is only for those who would like to do right. To these I say that rulers are not to be opposed with violence and rebellion, as the Romans, the Greeks, the Swiss and the Danes have done; but there are other ways of dealing with them.

In the first place, if they see that the rulers think so little of their soul's salvation that they rage and do wrong, of what importance is it that they ruin your property, body, wife and child? They cannot hurt your soul, and they do themselves more harm than they do you, because they damn their own souls and the ruin of body and property must then follow. Do you think that you are not already sufficiently revenged upon them?

In the second place, what would you do if these rulers of yours were at war and not only your goods and wives and children, but you yourself must be broken, imprisoned, burned and slain for your lord's sake? Would you for that reason slay your lord? How many fine people did Emperor Maximilian lose in war during his lifetime, but no one did anything to him for it; and if he had destroyed them by tyranny no more cruel deed would ever have been heard of. Nevertheless, he was the reason that they perished, for they were killed for his sake. How, then, does a raging tyrant differ from a perilous war which strikes many a fine and honest and innocent man? Nay, a wicked tyrant is more tolerable than a bad war, as you must admit if you inquire of your own reason and experience. I believe, indeed, that you would like to have peace and good days, but suppose God prevents you by war or tyrants! Now, make up your mind for yourself whether you would rather have war or tyrants, for you have deserved both, and are guilty before God, but we are such fellows that we want to be knaves and stay in sin, and yet want to avoid the punishments for sin even to resist it and defend our sin. We shall succeed as well as the dog who bites the spikes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly, "who attacks a hedge-hog." (Clemen).

**The  
Punish-  
ment of  
Wicked  
Rulers**

Job  
34:30

In the third place, if the rulers are bad, what of it? God is there, and He has fire, water, iron, stone and numberless ways of killing. How quickly He has slain a tyrant! He would do it, too, but our sins do not permit it; for He says in Job, "He letteth a knave rule because of the people's sins." It is easy enough to see that a knave rules, but no one is willing to see that he is ruling not because of his knavery, but because of the people's sin. The people do not look at their own sin, and think that the tyrant rules because of his knavery; so blinded, perverse and mad is the world! That is why things go as they went with the peasants in the revolt. They wanted to punish the sins of the rulers, just as though they were themselves pure and guiltless; therefore, God had to show them the beam in their eye in order to make them forget another's splinter.

Matt.  
7:3ff.

In the fourth place, the tyrants run the risk that, by God's decree, their subjects may rise up, as has been said, and slay them or drive them out. For we are here giving instruction to those who want to do what is right, and they are very few; the great multitude remain heathen, godless, and unchristian, and these, if God so decrees, set themselves wrongfully against the rulers and create disaster, as the Jews and Greeks and Romans often did. Therefore you have no right to complain that by our doctrine the tyrants and rulers gain security to do evil; nay, they are certainly not secure. We teach, to be sure, that they ought to be secure, whether they do good or evil; but we cannot give them this security or achieve it for them; for we cannot compel the multitude to follow our teaching, if God does not give us grace. We teach what we will, and the world does what it will. God must help, and we must teach those who are willing to do what is good and right so that they may help hold the multitude in check. Because of our teaching the lords are just as secure as they would be without our teaching; for unfortunately your complaint is unnecessary, since the most of the crowd do not listen to us and it rests with God and in God's hands alone to preserve the rulers, whom He alone has ordained. We experienced this in the

peasants' rebellion. Therefore, do not be misled by the fact that the rulers are wicked; their punishment and disaster are nearer than you could ask. The tyrant Dionysius of Syracuse confessed that his life was like that of a man over whose head a sword hung by a silken thread and under whom a glowing fire was burning.

In the fifth place, God has still another way to punish rulers, so that you have no need to revenge yourself. He can raise up foreign rulers, like the Goths against the Romans, the Assyrians against the Jews, etc., so that there is vengeance, punishment, and danger enough hanging over tyrants and rulers, and God does not allow them to be wicked and have peace and joy; He is right behind them, and has them between spurs and under bridle. This agrees, also, with the natural law that Christ teaches, in Matthew vii, "What ye would that people do to you, that do you to them." No father would be driven out by his own family, slain, or ruined because of his misdeeds (especially if the family did it out of disregard of authority and love of violence, in order to revenge themselves and be judges in their own case) without previous complaint to a higher authority. It ought to be just as wrong for any subject to act against his tyrant.

Matt.  
7:12

I must give an example or two of this. They should be noted, and it would be profitable to follow them. We read of a widow who stood and prayed for her tyrant most devoutly, that God would let him live long, etc. The tyrant heard it and was astonished because he well knew that he had done her much harm, and this prayer was unusual; for prayers for tyrants are not commonly of that kind. He asked her why she prayed thus for him. She answered, "I had ten cows in your grandfather's time; he took two of them and I prayed against him that he might die, and your father became lord. It came to pass, and your father took three cows. I prayed again that you might become lord, and he might die. Now you have taken four cows, and so I am praying for you, for I am afraid that he who comes after you will take the last cow and everything that I have." The

Illustra-  
tions

scholars, too, have a parable about a beggar who was full of wounds that flies got into, and sucked his blood and stung him. There came a merciful man who wanted to help him and drove all the flies away from him; but he cried out and said, "What are you doing? Those flies were almost full and did not worry me so much; now the hungry flies will come in their place and will plague me far worse."

Do you understand these fables? To change rulers and improve rulers are two things as far apart as heaven and earth; changing may be easy, improving is doubtful and risky. Why? Because it is not in our will or power but only in the will and the hand of God. The mad mob, however, does not ask so much how things can become better, but only that things may be changed; then if things are worse, they will want something still different. Thus they get bumble-bees for flies, and at last they get hornets for bumble-bees; like the frogs of old who could not put up with a log for lord; they got instead a stork that hacked them on the head and ate them.<sup>1</sup> A mad mob is a desperate, accursed thing; no one can rule it as well as tyrants. They are the club tied to the dog's neck. If there were a better way to rule them, God would have set some other ordinance over them than a sword and tyrants. The sword shows what kind of children it has under it; namely, people who would be desperate knaves if they dared.

Therefore, I advise everyone who would act in this matter with a good conscience and do what is right, that he be satisfied with the worldly rulers and make no attack upon them, seeing that worldly rulers cannot do harm to the soul, as clergy and false teachers do; and let him follow the good David, who suffered as much violence from King Saul as you can ever suffer, and yet would not lay a hand upon his king, as he could often have done, but commended the matter to God, let things go as long as God would have them so, and endured to the end. If war or strife arise against your

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. III, p. 333. "Frogs must have storks." (Cl. II, 383). Luther was very fond of Æsop's fables, publishing some of them in German in 1530 (Weimar Ed. I, 440 ff.)

overlord, leave the fighting and striving to those who want it; for, as has been said, if God does not hold back the crowd, we cannot hold them; but if you would do what is right and have a secure conscience, let your harness and arms lie, and do not fight against your lord or tyrant; rather suffer everything that can happen to you. The crowd which does the fighting, will find its judge.

"But," you say, "suppose that a king or lord has given an oath to his subjects to rule according to prescribed articles,<sup>1</sup> and does not keep them, and thus has the duty to give up the government. So it is said that the king of France must rule his kingdom according to the Parlements and the king of Denmark must also swear to certain articles, etc."

I answer: It is fine and just that rulers govern according to laws and administer them and do not rule according to their self-will. Nevertheless, I add this,—not only does a king promise to keep the law of his land or the articles of election, but God Himself commands him to be righteous, and he promises to do so. Well, then, if this king keeps neither God's law nor the law of the land, ought you to attack him, judge him, and take vengeance on him? Who has committed that to you? Another ruler would have to come between you, who would hear both sides and condemn the guilty party; otherwise you will not escape the judgment of God, who says, "Vengeance is mine," and again, "Judge not" (Matthew vii).

War of  
Inferiors  
Against  
Superiors  
Never  
Justified

Rom.  
12:19  
Matt.  
7:1

The case of the king of Denmark<sup>2</sup> is in point here. Luebeck and the sea-towns joined with the Danes to drive him out. Therefore, I shall give my answer for the sake of those who may, perhaps, have a bad conscience in this matter, on the chance that some of them may think better of their conduct and know themselves better. It is true, indeed, that the king is unjust before God and the world, and the law is entirely on the side of the Danes and the Luebeckers.

<sup>1</sup> The custom was not uncommon under the feudal regime. It contains the germ of modern constitutional government.

<sup>2</sup> Christian II, mentioned above. He was driven out by a combination of his own barons, supported by the Hanseatic League. Cf. Cambridge Modern History II, 228.

That is one thing. But there is another thing, viz., that the Danes and Luebeckers have proceeded as judges and overlords of the king, and have punished and avenged the wrong, and thus assumed the right of judgment and vengeance. Here come in questions for the conscience. If the case comes before God, He will not ask if the king was unjust and you just, for that has become clear; but He will ask, "You lords of Denmark and Luebeck, who commanded you to do these acts of punishment and vengeance? Did I command you, or did the emperor, or overlord? If so, prove it by letters patent." If they can do so, then they stand well; if not, God will judge thus, "You rebellious stealers from God, who lay hands upon my office and have taken it upon you to execute divine vengeance, you are guilty of *laesae majestatis divinae*,<sup>1</sup> that is, you have sinned against divine majesty and brought it down upon you." For to be wrong and to punish wrong are different things, *jus et executio juris, justitia et administratio justitiae*. To be right and wrong is common to every man; but to declare right and wrong is for Him who is Lord of right and wrong, and He is God alone, who commits this office to rulers, in His stead. Therefore, let no one assume to do this, unless he is sure that he has a command from God, or from God's servants, the rulers.

If things were to be so that everyone who was in the right might himself punish everyone who did wrong, what would become of the world? The servant would smite the master, the maid the mistress, the children the parents, the pupils the teacher. That would be a fine order of things? What need would there be, then, for judges and worldly rulers, appointed by God? Let the Danes and Luebeckers consider whether they would think it right if their servants, citizens and subjects resisted them whenever they were wronged. Why, then, do they not do to others what they would that others should do to them, and exempt others

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<sup>1</sup> "High treason against God."



from a rule from which they themselves wish to be exempt, as Christ teaches, in Matthew vii, and the natural law also teaches? To be sure, the Luebeckers and the other cities might help themselves by saying that they were not subjects of the king, but were dealing as enemy with enemy, or equal with equal. The poor Danes, however, were subjects and acted against their ruler without command from God, and the Luebeckers advised them and helped them. Thus they took upon themselves the burden of others' sins and mixed themselves up and entangled themselves and tied themselves up to this rebellious disobedience toward both God and man, not to mention the fact that they despised the emperor's commands also.

Matt.  
7:12

I mention this case here by way of illustration, because we are discussing the doctrine that a person of lower rank shall not oppose a person of higher rank; for this expulsion of the king of Denmark is a notable history, and serves here to warn all others, to beware of this example and in the hope that the consciences of those who did it may be touched and that some of them may reform and leave their iniquity, before God comes and revenges Himself on His enemies and those who have robbed Him. Not that all of them will care about this! The great multitude, as has been said, does not care about God's Word; it is an abandoned crowd and is being made ready for God's wrath and punishment. But I am satisfied that some will take it to heart and not involve themselves in the deeds of the Danes and Luebeckers, and if they have been involved, will get out of it and not be part-takers of other people's sin. For each of us has more than enough of his own sins to answer for.

At this point I shall have to pause and listen to my critics, who cry, "Ei, that means, I think, flattering the princes? Are you creeping now to the cross and seeking pardon? Are you afraid? etc." I let these bumble-bees buzz and be on their way. If anyone can do better, let him. I have not undertaken here to preach to the princes and lords. I think, too, that this flattery of mine will get me scant grace and that they will not be very glad for this flattery, because it

puts their whole class in jeopardy, as you have heard. Besides, I have said often enough elsewhere, and it is all too true, that the most of the princes and lords are godless tyrants and enemies of God, who persecute the Gospel and are my ungracious lords and sirs; and I am not greatly concerned about that. But I teach that everyone should know how to conduct himself in this matter and how he ought to act toward his superiors, and should do what God has commanded him, letting the lords look to themselves and stand on their own feet. God will not forget the tyrants and men of high rank; He is able to deal with them, and He has done so since the beginning of the world.

Princes  
May Not  
Go to War  
With  
Superiors

Moreover, I will not have what I write here applied to the peasants only, as though they were the only ones of lower rank, and the nobles were not subjects also. Not so! What I say about inferiors in rank is intended to hit peasants, burghers, nobles, counts and princes; for all these have overlords and are the inferiors in rank of someone else. Just as a rebellious peasant has his head struck off, so a rebellious nobleman, count, or prince should have his head struck off. The one should be treated like the other and no one is wronged.

The Emperor Maximilian, I believe, could have sung a pretty little song about rebellious princes and nobles who would have liked to make a disturbance and put their heads together. And the nobles! How often have they complained and made conspiracies and sought to defy the princes and make a disturbance? What a cry have the Franconian nobility alone raised about how little they care for the emperor or for their bishops. These knightlets must not be called disturbers or rebels, even though that were just what they were; the peasant must stand for it and keep still. But unless my mind deceives me, God has punished the rebellious lords and nobles by the rebellious peasants, one knave by another, since Maximilian had to endure them and could not punish them, though he had to restrain them as long as he

lived.<sup>1</sup> I would wager something that if the peasants had not revolted, a rebellion would have arisen among the nobles against the princes and perhaps against the emperor; so critical was the position of Germany.<sup>2</sup> But now the peasants got into it and they must be the only ones who are black; the nobles and princes get off easy, wipe their mouths, are pretty fellows, and never did anything bad. But God is not deceived and has given them a warning, so that they may learn by this example that they, too, must obey their rulers. Let this be my flattery of princes and lords!

Here you say, "Are we, then, to put up with a ruler who would be such a scoundrel that he let land and people go to ruin? To speak in the fashion of the nobility—Devil! St. Vitus' Dance. Pestilence! St. Anthony! St. Quirinus!" I am a nobleman, and who shall allow my wife and children and body and property to be so shamefully ruined?" I reply: Listen! I am teaching you nothing; go on about your business! You are smart enough; I am not needed. The only trouble it costs me is that of seeing how you will finish this high-pitched little song of yours.

To the others, who would like to keep their conscience clear, we have this to say. God has cast us into the world, under the power of the devil, so that we have here no paradise, but are to expect all kinds of misfortune to body, wife, child, property, and honor every hour; and if ten misfortunes do not come in an hour, nay, if you can live for an hour, you ought to say, "Oh, how great is the kindness which my God shows me, that in this hour every misfortune has not come!" "How is that? Am I not to have a happy hour under the devil's rule?" That is what we teach our people. Of course, you may do something else; build yourself a paradise where the devil may not come so that you need not expect the rage of any tyrant; we will look on! Ah, we are only too happy! We want things as they are!

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., The peasants. Maximilian died 1519.

<sup>2</sup> So gar stund Deudschland ynn einer Wage. "So evenly were the scales balanced in Germany."

<sup>3</sup> These words are all expletives. "St. Anthony's fire" is erysipelas; St. Quirinus' disease is not identified.

We do not recognize God's kindness, and do not believe in it,—the kindness He shows in protecting us, when the devil is so wicked! We want to be nothing but wicked knaves and yet receive nothing but good from God.

That is enough on the first point, viz., that war and conflict with superiors cannot be right; and although it often happens, and is in danger of happening every day, just as everything else that is bad and wrong also happens, if God decrees it and does not prevent it, nevertheless it does not turn out well in the end and does not remain unavenged, even though they who do it may have good fortune for a while.

War of  
Equals  
With  
Equals

Must  
Not be  
Wars of  
Aggression

Rom.  
13:4

Ps. 68:1

We will now take up the second point and discuss the question whether equals may fight with equals. This I would have understood as follows: It is not right to begin war whenever any crazy lord takes it into his head. For at the very outset, I want to say, above all else, that he who starts war is wrong, and it is just that he who first draws sword shall be defeated, or even punished, in the end. This is what has usually happened in history; those who have started wars have lost them, and it has been seldom that they have been beaten who have had to defend themselves. Worldly government has not been instituted by God to break peace and start war, but to maintain peace and repress the fighters. So Paul says, in Romans xiii, that the duty of the sword is to protect and punish, to protect the good in peace and punish the wicked with war; and God, who tolerates no wrong, so disposes things that the fighters must be fought down, and as the proverb says, "No one has ever been so bad, that someone is not worse." So, too, God has it sung of Him, in Psalm lxxvii, *Dissipat gentes, quae bella volunt*, "The Lord scattereth the peoples who have desire for war."

Beware, therefore; He does not lie! And be advised, and hold far, far apart will and must, desire and necessity, lust for war and willingness to fight. Do not let yourself be tempted to think yourself like the emperor of the Turks. Wait until need and must come without desire and will.

Then you will have enough to do and get enough of war, so that you can say, and your heart can boast, "I would gladly have had peace, if my neighbors had been willing." Thus you can defend yourself with a good conscience, for there stands God's word, "He scattereth those who have desire for war." Look at the real soldiers, those who have been in the game. They do not draw sword suddenly, do not brag, have no desire to smite; but when they are compelled, so that they have to do it, then beware of them; they do not jest; their sword is tight in the sheath, but if they have to draw, it does not return bloodless to the scabbard. On the other hand, the crazy fools who are the first to fight wars in their minds and make a fine start, devour the world with words, and are the first to draw their swords; but they are also the first to run away and to put up their swords. The Romans, that mighty empire, won most of their victories because they had to fight; that is, everybody hung on them and wanted to win his spurs at their expense, so that they had to defend themselves; then they laid about them vigorously enough. Hannibal, the prince out of Africa, hurt them so that he had almost destroyed them; but what shall I say? He had begun; he also had to stop. Courage (from God!) remained with the Romans, even though they lost, and where courage stays, deeds surely follow. For it is God who does the deeds, and He will have peace, and hates them that begin war and break peace.

I must mention here the example of Duke Frederick, Elector of Saxony, for it would be too bad if that wise prince's sayings were to die with his body.<sup>1</sup> He had to endure many wicked plots on the part of his neighbors and of others, and had such cause for war that another crazy prince, who had desire for war, would have started ten wars; and yet he kept his sword in the sheath, always gave the others good words, and acted as though he were very much afraid and almost ready to flee, and let the others boast and brag, though he held his ground before them. When asked why he let

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick had died in 1525.

them brag so, he replied, "I shall not start anything; but if I must fight, you shall see that it will be I who say when it is to stop." Thus he remained unbitten, though many dogs showed their teeth. He saw that they were fools and could be indulgent with them. If the king of France had not begun the war against the Emperor Charles, he would not have been so shamefully defeated and captured;<sup>1</sup> and now that the Venetians and Italians are setting themselves against the emperor, and starting trouble,<sup>2</sup> God grant that it may be they who must first stop it and let the word be true, "God scattereth those who desire war," for even though the emperor is my enemy, I do not love wrong.

**Illustrations  
from  
Scripture**

All this God confirms with fine examples in the Scriptures. He had His people first offer peace to the kingdoms of the Amorites and Canaanites and would not have His people begin the fight with them, so that this precept of His might be confirmed. On the other hand, when these kingdoms began the war and forced God's people to defend themselves, they had to go to pieces. Self-protection is a proper cause of war and therefore all laws agree that self-defense shall go unpunished, and he who kills another in self-defense is innocent in everyone's eyes. Again, when the people of Israel willed to smite the Canaanites without necessity, they were beaten (Numbers xiv); and when Joseph and Azarias wanted to fight in order to win honor, they were beaten; and Amaziah, king of Judah, also desired to war against the king of Israel, but read, in II Kings xiv, what happened to him; also King Ahab began to fight against the Syrians at Ramath, but lost and was destroyed (II Kings xxii); and the men of Ephraim would have devoured Jephthah and lost 42,000 men (Judges xii); and so on. You find that the losers were almost always those who started the war. The good king Josiah had to be slain because he began to fight against the king of Egypt, and had to make good the saying, "The Lord scattereth those who desire to war." Therefore

Num. 21:

22ff.

Deut. 2:

26ff.

Num.

14:45

I Macc.

5:55ff.

II Kings

14:8ff.

II Kings

22:2ff.

Judges

12:6

II Kings

23:29

Ps. 68:1

<sup>1</sup> At the battle of Pavia, Feb. 25, 1525.

<sup>2</sup> The trouble that resulted in the sack of Rome by the imperial army in May, 1527.

my people in the Harz have a proverb, "I have verily heard that he who smites is smitten." Why so? Because God rules the world powerfully and leaves no wrong unpunished. He who does wrong has his punishment from God, as sure as he lives, unless he repents and gives compensation to his neighbor. I believe that Muenzer and his peasants would have to admit this.

Let this be, then, the first thing to be said on this point,—War is not right, even between equal and equal, unless it is fought with such a good conscience that one can say, "My neighbor compels and forces me to fight, though I would rather avoid it." In that case, it can be called not only war, but due protection and self-defense. For a distinction must be made among wars; some are begun out of a desire and will to fight and before one is attacked, others are forced by necessity and compulsion after the attack has been made by the other party. The first kind can be called wars of desire, the second wars of necessity. The first kind are of the devil; God give him no good fortune! The second kind are human misfortunes; God help in them!

Be instructed, therefore, dear lords! Keep yourselves from war, unless you have to defend and protect yourselves and the office which you bear compels you to fight. Then let war come; hew in; be men, and test your armor; for then you are not fighting in your minds. The case will be serious enough, and the teeth of the wrathful, boasting, proud iron-biters will get so blunt that they will scarcely be able to bite fresh butter.

The reason is this. Every lord and prince is bound to protect his people and get peace for them. That is his office; it is for that that he has the sword (Romans xiii). This should be for him a matter of conscience and he should so depend upon it as to know that this work is right in the eyes of God and is commanded by Him. I am not now teaching what Christians are to do; for your rule does not concern us Christians, but we are rendering you a service and telling you what you are to do before God, in your office of ruling. A Christian is a person to himself; he believes for

Rom.  
13:4

himself and for no one else. But a lord and prince is not a person to himself, but to others; he has to serve them, that is, protect and defend them. To be sure it were good if he were a Christian besides and believed in God; then he would be happy; but it is not princely to be a Christian and therefore few princes can be Christians, as they say, "A prince is a rare bird in heaven."<sup>1</sup> Now even if they are not Christians, nevertheless they ought to do what is right and good according to God's outward ordinance; He will have this of them.

But if a lord or prince does not perceive this duty and commandment, and lets himself think that he is prince, not for his subjects' sake, but because of his beautiful, yellow hair, as though God had made him a prince so that he may rejoice in his power and wealth and honor, take pleasure in these things and rely on them;—if that be the case, he belongs among the heathen, nay, he is a fool. That kind of prince would start a war over an empty nut and think of nothing except satisfying his self-will. God keeps that kind of prince in check by the fact that others, too, have fists and that there are people the other side of the mountain, too; thus one sword keeps the other in the scabbard. But a prince who has his reason does not consider himself; he is satisfied if his subjects are obedient. Though his enemies and neighbors boast and brag and let fly many bad words, he thinks, "Fools always gabble more than wise men; many words go into the bag and silence is an answer to much." Therefore he does not concern himself much about them until he sees that his subjects are attacked or finds the sword actually drawn; then he defends himself as well as he can, ought, and must. Otherwise, one who is such a coward as to take up every word and seek the reason for it, is trying to catch the wind in his cloak; how much peace or profit he will have from that, let him confess himself; then you will find out.

That is the first thing on this point; it is equally necessary

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 163; Vol. III, p. 184; cf. Vol. IV, p. 231.



to note the second. Even though you are sure and certain that you are not beginning it, but are forced into war, nevertheless you must fear God and have Him before your eyes, and not march out, saying, "Yes, I am forced into it and have good cause for war." If you depend on that and plunge in headlong, that, too, is not the thing to do. It is true that you have good reason to fight and defend yourself, but that does not give you God's guarantee that you will win. Indeed this very confidence may well be a reason why you must lose, even though you had just cause for war, since God cannot suffer confidence and pride except in one who humbles himself before Him and fears Him. It pleases Him when one fears neither man nor devil and is bold and confident, brave and firm against both, if they began the war and are in the wrong; but that this should win the victory, as though it were our deeds or power that did it, there is nothing in that! He will be feared and hear us singing, from our hearts, a song like this,—“Dear Lord, Thou seest that I have to go to war, though I would be glad not to; I do not build, however, on the justice of my cause, but on Thy grace and mercy; for I know that if I were to rely on my just cause and be confident because of it, Thou shouldest rightly let me fall as one whose fall was just, because I relied upon my right and not upon Thy sheer grace and kindness.”

Must be  
Fought  
in the  
Fear of  
God

Hear what the heathen say about this, the Greeks and Romans, who knew nothing of God and the fear of God. They held that it was they themselves who made war and won victories; but by long experience, in which a great and well-armed people was often beaten by a small number of ill-armed folk, they had to learn and freely admit that nothing in war is more dangerous than to be secure and confident, and thus they reached the conclusion that one should never despise the enemy, no matter how small he may be; also that one should surrender no advantage, no matter how small it be; also that one should neglect no precaution, vigilance, or attention, no matter how small it be; everything must be measured out as though one were weighing gold. Foolish, confident, heedless people serve no purpose in war, except to

do harm. The word, *Non putassem*,—"I did not think of it,"—they held to be the most shameful word that a soldier could speak, for it is a sign of a secure, confident, careless man, who in one moment, by one step, with one word, can do more damage than ten of him can repair, and then will say, "Indeed I did not think of it." How terribly Prince Hannibal smote the Romans while they were confident and secure against him; and cases of the kind are innumerable in history, and are daily before our eyes.

The heathen learned this by experience and taught it, but did not know how to give any reason or cause for it, except to blame it on Fortune, of which they had to be afraid. But the reason and cause is, as I have said, that God would testify by all such histories that He will be feared, and even in such things will not endure confidence, despite, temerity, or security, until we learn to take from His hands all that we can have, as a gift of pure grace and mercy. Therefore, it is a strange thing that a soldier who has a good cause should be at the same time confident and discouraged. How can he fight, if he is discouraged? But if he fights undiscouraged, there is the more danger. This, then, is what he should do. Before God, he should be discouraged, fearful, and humble, and commit his cause to Him, that He may dispose things, not according to our law, but according to His kindness and grace; thus he wins God to his side with an humble, fearful heart. Toward men, he should be bold, free, confident, because they are in the wrong, and smite them with a confident and untroubled spirit. Why should we not do for our God what the Romans, the greatest fighters on earth, did for their false god, Fortune, whom they feared? If they did not do this, they fought a perilous battle, or were badly beaten.

Therefore, our conclusion on this point is that war against equals should be a thing that is made necessary and should be fought in the fear of God. It is made necessary when an enemy or neighbor makes the attack and starts the war, and will not help when one offers to settle the case by legal procedure, discussion, or agreement; or when one passes over and puts up with all sorts of evil words and tricks, but will

be content with nothing but his own way.<sup>1</sup> For I am assuming throughout that I am preaching to those who want to do right before God; those who will neither offer nor consent to do what is right do not concern me. To fear God is not to rely on the justice of one's cause, but to be careful, diligent, and cautious, even in the very smallest details, in so small a thing as a whistle. With all this, however, God's hands are not bound, so that He cannot bid us make war against those who have given us no occasion. Thus He bade the children of Israel go to war against the Canaanites. In such a case there is necessity enough, viz., the command of God; though even such a war should not be fought without fear and care, as God shows, in Joshua iii, when the children of Israel marched confidently against the men of Ai, and were beaten. A necessity of the same kind arises, if subjects fight at the command of their rulers; for God commands that men are to obey their ruler, and his command is a necessity, though this, too, must be done with fear and humility. Of this we shall say more hereafter.

Josh.  
7:1ff.

The third question is whether superiors have the right to go to war with inferiors. We have, indeed, heard above that subjects are to be obedient and are even to suffer wrong from their tyrants, so that, if things go well, the rulers have nothing to do with their subjects except cultivate right, righteousness and judgment; but if they rise and rebel, as the peasants did lately, then it is right and proper to fight against them. That, too, is what a prince should do to his nobles, an emperor to his princes, if they are rebellious and start a war. Only it must be done in the fear of God, and too much reliance must not be placed on one's right, so that God may not determine that the lords be punished by their subjects, even though the subjects are in the wrong. This has often happened, as we have heard above. For to be right and to do right do not always go together; nay, they never go together except by the gift of God. Therefore, although it is right that subjects be quiet and suffer everything, and not

**War of  
Superiors  
Against  
Inferiors**

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<sup>1</sup>Wil schlechts mit dem kopffe hyndurch.  
Vol. V—5.

revolt, nevertheless, it is not for men to decide whether they shall do so; for God has appointed inferiors to care for themselves alone and has taken the sword from them and has put them in a prison; and if they make a disturbance about it, and gather others to them, and break loose, and take the sword, then before God they are worthy of judgment and death.

Superiors, on the other hand, are appointed to be a common person,<sup>1</sup> and do not exist for themselves alone. They are to have the attachment of their subjects and are to bear the sword. For compared to the emperor, his overlord, a prince is not a prince, but an individual in the obedience of the emperor, as all others are, each for himself; but compared to his subjects, he is as many persons as he has people under him and attached to him. So the emperor, too, when compared with God, is not emperor, but an individual person like all others; but compared with his subjects, he is as many times emperor as he has people under him. The same thing is to be said of all other rulers. When compared to their overlord, they are not rulers at all and are stripped of all rulership. When compared to one another, they are all adorned with rulership. Thus, in the end, all rulership comes to God, whose alone it is; for He is emperor, prince, count, noble, judge, and everything, and He divides these out to His subjects as He wills, and brings them back again to Himself. Now no individual person ought to set himself against the community or attach the community to him, for in so doing he is chopping above his head, and the chips will surely fall in his eyes. From this you see how they resist the ordinance of God who resist their rulers, as St. Paul teaches in Romans xiii. Thus he says also, in I Corinthians xv, that God will abolish all rulership, when He Himself shall reign and return all things to Himself.

Rom.  
13:2  
I Cor.  
15:24

So much on these three points; now come the questions. No king can go to war alone, any more than he can administer the law courts alone; he must have people who serve him

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<sup>1</sup>Eine gemeine person, i.e., the community assumes personality in the ruler; in him the community is one person.

in war, just as he must have counsellors, judges, lawyers, prison-keepers, executioners, and whatever else belongs to justice. Therefore, the question arises whether a man ought to take wages,—*Dienstgeld* or *Manngeld*, as they call it,—and hire himself out, binding himself to serve the prince as the times may demand, according to the present custom. In answer to this question, we make a distinction among these soldiers.

Some Questions:  
1. Ought a Soldier Take Pay?

In the first place, there are the subjects, who, even without such an arrangement, are obligated to aid their overlords with body and goods and obey their summons. For the goods that counts, lords and nobles hold, were parcelled out in ancient times by the Romans and the Roman emperors and given in fief on the condition that those who possess them should always be armed and ready, the one with so many horses and men, the other with so many, according to the size of the holding. The holdings were the wages with which they were hired. Therefore they are called fiefs and these incumbrances still rest upon them. The emperor permits these holdings to be inherited and this is right and fine in the Roman Empire; but the Turk, it is said, allows none of them to be inherited and tolerates no hereditary principality, county, or knights' fee, or fief, but appoints to them, and gives them how, when, and to whom he will. Therefore he has such immeasurable wealth and is lord in the land, or rather a tyrant.

The nobles, therefore, may not think that they have their property for nothing, as though they had found it, or won it in gambling. The encumbrance on it and the feudal dues show whence and why they have it, namely, as a loan from the emperor or the prince, so that they ought not use it for display and riotous conduct, but be armed and prepared for war for the protection of the land and the maintenance of peace. Now if they complain that they must keep horses and serve the princes and lords when others have quiet and peace, I reply: Dear sir, let me tell you something. You have your pay and your fief, and are appointed to this office and well paid for it. But have not others, too, work enough to

do on their little properties? Or are you the only ones who have work to do? And your office<sup>1</sup> is seldom called for, but others must do their duty every day. If you are not willing to do this or think it burdensome or unjust, then let your fief go; others will be found who will be glad to accept it and do in return what it requires.

Therefore, the wise have included all the work of men in two divisions, *agriculturam* and *militiam*, that is, agriculture and warfare, and this is the natural division. Agriculture is to feed and warfare to defend. Those who are in the defending office are to get their income and their food from those who are in the feeding office, in order that they can defend; those who are in the feeding office are to have protection from those who are in the defending office, in order that they can feed. The emperor or prince in the land is to look to both offices and see to it that those in the defending office are armed and mounted, and those in the feeding office are honestly trying to increase the food; but useless people, who neither feed nor defend, but only consume, loaf, and live in idleness, he should not tolerate, but drive out of the land, as the bees do, who sting the drones to death, because they do not work and only eat up the honey of the other bees. Thus Solomon, in his Ecclesiastes,

Ecc.  
5:8

calls the kings builders, who build the land, for that should be their office. But God preserve us Germans! We are not getting wise and doing this the right way, but are continuing for a while to be consumers, and letting those be feeders and defenders who have the desire for it or cannot get around it. That this first class have a right to their pay and their fiefs, and do right when they help their lord make war and serve him in so doing, as is their duty,—this St. John the Baptist has confirmed, in Luke ii. When the soldiers asked him what they were to do, he answered, "Be content with your wages." For if it were wrong for them to take wages, or if their occupation were against God, he could not have let it continue, permitted it, and confirmed it, but, as a godly,

Luke  
3:14

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., Fighting.

Christian teacher, he would have had to rebuke it and keep them from it. This is the answer to those who, because of tenderness of conscience,—though this is now rare among these people,—profess that it is perilous to take up this occupation for the sake of temporal goods, since it is nothing else than bloodshed, murder, and the infliction of all suffering upon one's neighbor, as times of war show. These men should inform their consciences that they do not do this from choice, desire, or ill-will, but that the word is God's and that it is their duty to their prince and their God. Therefore, since it is a right office, ordained of God, it is fitting that there should be pay and reward for it, as Christ says, in Matthew x, "A laborer is worthy of his hire."

Of course, it is true that if a man serves as a soldier, with a heart that neither seeks nor thinks of anything but acquiring wealth, and if temporal wealth is his only reason for doing it, he is not happy when there is peace and is sorry when there is no war. Such a man goes off the track and is the devil's own, even though he fights out of obedience to his lord and on his summons; for he makes a bad work out of a work that is, in itself, good; with the addition that he does not pay much attention to the fact that he serves from obedience and duty, but only seeks his own profit. Therefore he has not a good conscience, which can say, "Well, for my part, I would like to stay at home, but because my lord calls me and asks me, I come in God's name and know that I am serving God in so doing, and I will earn or take the pay that is given me for it." For a soldier ought to have the knowledge and confidence that he is doing his duty, and must do it, and thus be certain that he is serving God, and can say, "It is not I that smite, stab, slay, but God and my prince, whose servants my hand and my body now are." For that is the meaning of the watchwords and battle-cries, "Emperor!" "France!" "Lueneburg!" "Brunswick!" So the Jews cried against the Midianites, "The sword of God and Gideon!"

Judges  
7:20

An avaricious fellow spoils all other good works, too; for

Matt.  
10:10

example, a man who preaches for temporal wealth is lost, though Christ says that a preacher shall live from the Gospel. To do things for temporal wealth is not bad, for income, wages, and pay are temporal wealth. If that were so, no one could work or do anything for his support, because everything is done for temporal wealth. But to be greedy of temporal wealth and make a Mammon of it is wrong always in all positions, in all occupations and works. Leave out greed and other evil thoughts, and to fight in war is not sin; take your wages for it, and whatever is given you. Therefore, I said above that the work is, in itself, right and godly, but it becomes wrong if the person is wrong or uses it wrongly.

2. Ought  
a Soldier  
Fight  
in a  
Wrong  
Cause?

Acts  
5:29

A second question: "Suppose my lord were wrong in going to war." I reply: If you know for sure that he is wrong, then you should fear God rather than men (Acts iv), and not fight or serve, for you cannot have a good conscience before God. "Nay," you say, "my lord compels me, takes my fief, does not give me my money, pay, and wages; and besides, I am despised and put to shame as a coward, nay, as a faith-breaker in the eyes of the world, as one who has deserted his lord in need." I answer: You must take that risk and, with God's help, let go what goes; He can restore it to you a hundredfold, as He promises in the Gospel, "He that leaveth house, home, wife, goods, for my sake, shall get it back a hundredfold." In all other works, too, we must expect the danger that the rulers will compel us to do wrong; but since God will have us leave even father and mother for His sake, we must certainly leave lords for His sake. But if you do not know, or cannot find out whether your lord is wrong, you ought not to weaken an uncertain obedience with an uncertainty of right, but should think the best of your lord, as is the way of love, for "Love believeth all things; thinketh no evil" (I Corinthians xiii). Thus you are secure, and walk well before God. If they put you to shame, or call you faithless, it is better that God call you faithful and honorable than that the world call you faithful and honorable. What good would it do you, if the world

Matt.  
19:29

I Cor.  
13:7



held you for a Solomon or a Moses, and before God you were counted as bad as Saul or Ahab?

The third question: "Can a soldier obligate himself to serve more than one lord and take wages or service-money from each?" Answer: I said above that greed is wrong, whether in a good or a bad occupation. Agriculture is certainly one of the best occupations, and yet a greedy farmer is wrong and is condemned before God. So in this case, to take wages is just and right, and to serve for wages is also right, even though the wages were scarcely a g u l d e n a year. Again, to take wages and serve for them is, in itself, right, no matter whether they come from one or two or three or ever so many lords, so long as your hereditary lord or prince is not deprived of his dues, and your service to others is rendered with his will and consent. Just as a good artisan may sell his skill to anyone who will have it, and thus serve the one he sells to, so long as this is not against his ruler and his community; so a soldier has his skill in fighting from God and can serve with it whoever desires his service, exactly as though it were an art or trade, and he can take pay for it as though for his work. For this, too, is a calling that springs from the law of love; if any one needs me and calls for me, I am at his service, and take for this whatever is due, or what is given me; for thus says St. Paul, in I Corinthians ix, "No one serveth at his own charges." So he approves this right. Since, then, a prince needs and requires another's subject for fighting, the subject, with his own prince's consent and knowledge, may serve and take pay for it.

3. Can a  
Soldier  
Fight  
for More  
Than One  
Prince?

I Cor.  
9:7

"But suppose that one of the princes or lords were to make war against the other, and I were obligated to both, but preferred to serve the one who was in the wrong, because he has showed me more grace or kindness than the one who was in the right and from whom I get less,—what then?" Here is the quick, short answer: Right, that is, that which pleases God, should be above wealth, body, honor and friends, grace, and enjoyment, and in this case there is no respecting of persons, but only of God. In this case, too, a man must

put up with it if he is considered ungrateful or is despised, for here there is an honest excuse, namely God and right, which will not allow him to serve the one he likes best and leave the one he likes least. Although the old Adam does not listen willingly to this, nevertheless, it must be so if right is to be kept; for there is no fighting against God, and he who fights against right fights against God, who gives, orders, and maintains all right.

**4. Ought  
a Soldier  
Fight for  
Glory?**

The fourth question: "What is to be said about the man who goes to war not only for the sake of wealth, but also for the sake of temporal honor, in order that he may become a big man and be looked up to?" Answer: Greed of money and greed of honor both are greed, the one as wrong as the other, and he who fights in this vice gets hell for himself. We are to leave the honor and give the honor to God alone and be satisfied with the wages and rations. It is, therefore, a heathen and not a Christian custom to exhort soldiers before the battle like this,—“Dear comrades, dear soldiers, be brave and confident; God willing, we shall get honor today and become rich.” On the contrary, they should be exhorted like this,—“Dear comrades, we are gathered here in service, duty, and obedience to our prince, and, according to God’s will and ordinance, we are bound to stand by him with body and goods. Although, before God, we are poor sinners, as are our enemies, nevertheless, since we know that our prince is in the right in this case, or at least do not know otherwise, we are therefore sure and certain that in serving and obeying him, we are serving God. Let everyone, then, be brave and courageous and let no one think otherwise than that his fist is God’s fist, his pike God’s pike, and cry with heart and voice, ‘God and the Emperor!’ If God gives us victory, the honor and praise shall be His, not ours, for He does it through us poor sinners. But the booty and the pay we will take as presents and gifts of His goodness and grace to us, who are unworthy, and thank Him for them from our hearts. Now God grant the victory! Forward, with joy!”

For without doubt, if one seeks the honor of God and lets Him have it—as is just and right, and as it ought to be!

—then more honor will come than anyone could seek, because God has promised in I Kings ii, "He that honoreth me, him will I honor again; but he that dishonoreth me shall be dishonored in return." Since He cannot fail to keep this promise of His, He must honor those who honor Him, and it is one of the greatest sins when one seeks one's own honor, for this is nothing else than *crimen laesae majestatis divinae*—"robbery of the divine majesty."<sup>1</sup> Let others, therefore, boast and seek honor; do you be obedient and quiet, and your honor will find you. Many a battle is lost that might have been won if honor alone could have done it. For these honor-greedy warriors do not believe that God is in the war and gives the victory; therefore they do not fear God and are not joyful, but foolhardy and mad; and at last they are beaten.

I Sam.  
2:30

But I think those the best "comrades" who encourage themselves, and have themselves encouraged, before the battle with the thought of the women whom they love, and have this said to them, "Ha, now, let everyone think of her whom he loves best." I say this, if I had not heard that this was done from two credible men, who had had experience in these matters, I would never have believed that in a business of this kind, where the danger of death stares men in the face, the human heart could so forget itself and be so light. No one does this, to be sure, when he fights alone with death, but here in the crowd the one stirs up the other, and no one gives a thought to what affects him, because it affects many. But to a Christian heart it is terrible to think and hear that in the hour when one has God's judgment and the peril of death before him, he tickles himself and encourages himself with fleshly love; for those who are killed or die thus certainly send their souls straight to hell without delay.

"Nay," they say, "if I were to think of hell, I could never go to war at all." That is still worse, to put God and His judgment wilfully out of mind and neither know nor think nor hear anything about them. Therefore a great part of

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<sup>1</sup> We might render it, "high treason against God." Cf. above, p. 52.

the soldiers belong to the devil, and some of them are so full of the devil that they know no better way to prove their joy than by speaking contemptuously of God and His judgment, as though they were the real iron-eaters when they dare to swear shamefully by the Passion, and curse, and defy God in heaven. It is a lost crowd; it is chaff, and as in other classes, there is much chaff and little wheat.

It follows that the *lands knechts*,<sup>1</sup> who wander about the land seeking war, though they might work and ply a trade till they were called for, and who thus waste their time, from laziness or from roughness and wildness of spirit cannot be on good terms with God. They can show God no reason and no good conscience for their gadding about, but have only a foolhardy desire or eagerness for war or for the leading of a free, wild life. In the nature of them, a part of these fellows must finally become knaves and robbers. But if they were to betake themselves to labor, or a trade, and were to earn their bread, as God has commanded all men to do, until their prince summoned them for himself, or permitted and asked them to go to another, then they could stand up with a good conscience as men who knew that they were serving the pleasure of their overlord by it; and this fine conscience they could not have otherwise. For it ought to be to all the world a comfort and joy, nay, a mighty reason for loving and honoring rulers, that Almighty God shows us this great grace and appoints rulers for us as an outward sign of His will, so that we are sure we are pleasing His divine will and doing right, whenever we do the will and pleasure of the ruler. For He has fastened and bound His will to them, when He says, "Give to Cæsar what is Cæsar's," and in Romans xiii, "Let everyone be subject to the rulers."

Matt.  
22:21  
Rom.  
13:1

Superstitions of  
Soldiers

Finally, soldiers have many superstitions in battle. One commends himself to St. George, another to St. Christopher; one to this saint, another to that. Some can conjure iron and bullets; some can bless horse and rider; some carry St. John's Gospel, or some other object on which they rely. All

<sup>1</sup> The German mercenary soldiers, who were found in most of the armies of Europe.

these are in perilous state, for they do not believe in God, but rather sin through unbelief and false belief in God, and if they were to die, they must needs be lost. This is what they ought to do. When the battle begins and the exhortation, of which I spoke above, has been given, they should commend themselves simply to God's grace and adopt a Christian attitude. For the exhortation above is only a form for doing the external work of war with a good conscience; but since no good work saves men, everyone should say this exhortation, too, in his heart or with his lips,—“Heavenly Father, here I am, according to Thy divine will, in the external work and service of my lord, which I owe first to Thee and then to my lord for Thy sake. I thank Thy grace and mercy that Thou hast put me into a work of which I am sure that it is not sin, but right and pleasing obedience to Thy will. But because I know and have learned from Thy gracious Word that none of our good works can help us and no one is saved as a soldier but only as a Christian, therefore, I will rely not at all on this obedience and work of mine, but put myself freely at the service of Thy will and believe from the heart that only the innocent blood of Thy dear Son, my Lord Jesus Christ, redeems and saves me, and this He has shed for me in obedience to Thy holy will. On this I stay; on this I live and die; on this I fight and do all. Dear Lord God the Father, preserve and strengthen this faith in me by Thy Spirit. Amen.” If then you want to say the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, you may do so, and let that be enough. Thus commit body and soul to His hands, and draw sword, and smite in God's name.

If there were many such soldiers in an army, who, think you, would do anything to them? They would devour the world without lifting sword. Nay, if there were nine or ten such in a company, or only three or four, who could say these things with a true heart, I would prefer them to all the guns, pikes, horses and armor, and I would let the Turk come on, with all his power; for Christian faith is not a jest, nor is it a little thing, but as Christ says in the Gospel, “It can do all things.” But, my dear sir, where are those

Isa.  
55:11

who believe thus, and can do such things? Nevertheless, although the crowd does not do this, we must teach it and know it for the sake of those who will do it, however few they may be. For God's Word does not go out in vain, says Isaiah, lo, it brings some to God. The others who despise this wholesome teaching, given for their salvation, have their Judge to whom they must make answer. We are excused, and have done our part.

Here I shall let this rest for this time. I wanted to say something about war against the Turk, because he had come so close to us, and some reproached me as though I had advised against war with the Turk.<sup>1</sup> I have long known that at last I would have to become a Turk, and it does not help me that I have written so plainly about this and have said, especially in the book *On Temporal Government*, that equal may well go to war with equal. But since the Turk is back home again and our Germans are no longer asking about this, it is not yet time to write about it.<sup>2</sup>

This instruction, my dear Assa, I should have completed long ago; but it has been delayed so long that meanwhile, by God's grace, you and I have become godfathers.<sup>3</sup> And yet I hope that the delay has not been fruitless and that the cause has been furthered by it. I commend you to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Among the statements condemned in the bull of excommunication (1520) was one to this effect.

<sup>2</sup> The time came in 1528. See *On War Against the Turk*, this volume, p. 81 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See *Introduction*, above, p. 31.

ON  
WAR AGAINST THE TURK  
1529





## INTRODUCTION

On August 5, 1528, Luther wrote to Nicholas Hausmann, thanking him for a rattle that Hausmann had sent to little Hans. In that letter he said, "I had determined to write something about the Turkish war, but I hope it will be needless."<sup>1</sup> In October of the same year he went to work at it; the Letter of Dedication bears the date, October 9th.<sup>2</sup> The publication was long delayed, however, as the printer lost the whole first part of the work and it had to be rewritten. It finally came from the press, April 23, 1529.

Its publication was timely. The Second Diet of Spires was then in session and one of the most important questions that it had to discuss was that of ways and means for resisting the Turkish invasion that was then threatening and that ultimately carried a Turkish army up to the walls of Vienna in September, 1529. One of the most serious anxieties of Charles V and his brother, Ferdinand of Austria, was caused by the possibility that the Lutheran powers in Germany might demand toleration for Lutheranism as the price for their military support against the Turks.

From the beginning of his public career, Luther had spoken of the Turks as the rod of God's anger. He looked upon their invasions of Central Europe as a divine visitation upon the sins of rulers and people. In the *Resolutiones* of the Ninety-five Theses<sup>3</sup> he had declared that the leaders of the Church wanted to go to war, not against iniquity and sin, but against the rod of punishment that God was sending. In so doing they were fighting against God. This statement was one of those condemned, in 1520, in the bull *Exsurge domine*. Luther explained and defended it, in 1521,<sup>4</sup> and uses it here as the point of departure for his discussion.<sup>5</sup>

In this tract Luther comes out clearly in favor of national defense against Turkish aggression. A few months later, after the raising of the siege of Vienna, he expressed himself even more strongly in the *Heerpredigt wider den Türken*.<sup>6</sup>

The fact is that Luther had never really objected to a war of defense against the Turks. But he had objected to such a war in alliance with and under the direction of the papacy. It must not be a crusade. Warfare was not in any sense the business or the duty of the Church, but of the State. Defense against the Turks devolves upon the emperor, and upon no one else, not because he is a Christian or "defender of the faith," but purely and simply because he is emperor. On the other hand such a war can be undertaken with good prospects of success, only in case it is undertaken humbly and in the

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<sup>1</sup> ENDERS VI, 314; SMITH & JACOBS, *Luther's Correspondence*, II, 451.

<sup>2</sup> See below.

<sup>3</sup> Weimar Ed., I, 535.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. in this edition, Vol. III, p. 11 ff.

<sup>5</sup> See below.

<sup>6</sup> Weimar Ed. XXX<sup>2</sup>, 160 ff.

fear of God. The whole tract should be read in connection with that on Soldiers,<sup>1</sup> and that On Temporal Government,<sup>2</sup> and the Explanation of the Eighty-second Psalm.<sup>3</sup>

The text is found in Weimar Ed., XXX<sup>2</sup>, 107 ff.; Erlangen Ed. XXXI, 31 ff.; St. Louis Ed. XX, 2108 ff.; Berlin Ed., VII, 438 ff. The translation is from the Weimar text.

CHARLES M. JACOBS

MOUNT AIRY  
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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<sup>1</sup> Above, pp. 32 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III, pp. 228 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. IV, pp. 287 ff.

To the  
Serene, highborn Prince and Lord,  
Philip, Landgrave of Hesse.  
Count of Katzenellenbogen,  
Ziegenhain and Nidda,  
My gracious lord.

Grace and peace in Christ Jesus our Lord and Saviour.  
Serene, highborn Prince, gracious Lord.

Certain persons have been begging me for the past five years to write about war against the Turks, and encourage our people and stir them up to it, and now that the Turk is actually approaching, my friends are compelling me to do this duty, especially since there are some stupid preachers among us Germans (as I am sorry to hear) who are making the people believe that we ought not and must not fight against the Turks. Some are even so crazy as to say that it is not proper for Christians to bear the temporal sword or to be rulers; also because our German people are such a wild and uncivilized folk that there are some who want the Turk to come and rule. All the blame for this wicked error among the people is laid on Luther and must be called "the fruit of my Gospel," just as I must bear the blame for the rebellion,<sup>1</sup> and for everything bad that happens anywhere in the world. My accusers know better, but God and His Word to the contrary, they pretend not to know better, and seek occasion to speak evil of the Holy Ghost and of the truth that is openly confessed, so that they may earn the reward of hell and never receive repentance or the forgiveness of their sins.

Therefore it is necessary for me to write of these things for my own sake and the Gospel's sake and to enter our defense; not because of the blasphemers, however. They are not good enough to make it worth while to say a single word

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<sup>1</sup> The Peasants' Revolt of 1525.

of defense to them, for to them the Gospel must always be a stench and a savor of death unto death, as they have deserved by their willful blasphemy. But I must write in order that innocent consciences may not any longer be deceived by these slandermongers, and made suspicious of me or my doctrine, and may not be deceived into believing that we must not fight against the Turks. I have thought best to publish this little book under the name of your Grace, who are a famous and mighty prince, so that it may be the better received and the more diligently read. Thus, if it came to a discussion of a campaign against the Turks, the princes and lords would readily recall it. I commend your Grace to our merciful God's grace and favor, that He may keep your Grace against all error and against the craft of the devil, and illumine and strengthen your Grace for a blessed reign.

Your Grace's devoted

MARTIN LUTHER

WITTENBERG, OCTOBER 9, 1528

# ON WAR AGAINST THE TURK

1529

Pope Leo the Tenth, in the bull in which he put me under the ban, condemned, among other statements, the following one. I had said that "to fight against the Turk is the same thing as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod."<sup>1</sup> From this article they may get it, who say that I prevent and dissuade from war against the Turk. I still confess freely that this article is mine and that I put it forth and defended it at the time; and if things in the world were in the same state now that they were in then, I would still have to put it forth and defend it. But it is not fair to forget how things then stood in the world, and what my grounds and reasons were, and still keep my words and apply them to another situation where those grounds and reasons do not exist. With this kind of art, who could not make the Gospel a pack of lies or pretend that it contradicted itself?

Luther's  
Former  
Views

This was the state of things at that time,—no one had taught, no one had heard, and no one knew anything about temporal government, whence it came, what its office and work was, or how it ought to serve God. The most learned men (I shall not name them) held temporal government for a heathen, human, ungodly thing, as though it were perilous to salvation to be in the ranks of the rulers. Therefore, the priests and monks had so driven kings and princes into the corner, as to persuade them that, to serve God, they must undertake other works, such as hearing mass, saying prayers, endowing masses, etc. In a word, princes and lords who wanted to be pious men held their rank and office as of no value and did not consider it a service of God. They became really priests and monks, except that they did not wear tonsures and cowls. If they would serve God, they must go to

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction above, and Vol. III, p. 7 f, 11 ff.

church. All the lords then living would have to testify to this, for they knew it by experience. My gracious lord, Duke Frederick, of blessed memory, was so glad when I first wrote *On Temporal Government*,<sup>1</sup> that he had the little book copied out and put in a special binding, and was happy that he could see what his position was before God.

Eph. 4:6 Thus the pope and the clergy were, at that time, all in all, over all, and through all, like God in the world, and the temporal rulers were in darkness, oppressed and unknown. But the pope and his crowd wanted to be Christians, too, and therefore pretended to make war on the Turk. Over those two points the discussion arose, for I was then working on doctrine that concerned Christians and the conscience, and had as yet written nothing about the temporal rulers. The papists, therefore, called me a flatterer of the princes, because I was dealing only with the spiritual class,<sup>2</sup> and not with the temporal; just as they call me seditious, now that I have written in such glorification of temporal government as no teacher has done since the days of the apostles, except, perhaps, St. Augustine.<sup>3</sup> Of this I can boast with a good conscience and the testimony of the world will support me.

Among the points of Christian doctrine, I discussed what Christ says, in Matthew, viz., that a Christian shall not resist evil, but endure all things, let the coat go and the cloak, let them be taken from him, offer the other cheek, etc. Of this the pope, with his universities and cloister-schools, had made "an advice," not a commandment, and not a rule that a Christian must keep; thus they had perverted Christ's word, spread false doctrine throughout the world, and deceived Christians. Since, therefore, they wanted to be Christians, nay, the best Christians in the world, and yet fight against the Turk, endure no evil, and suffer neither compulsion nor wrong, I opposed them with this saying of Christ that Christians shall not resist evil, but suffer all

<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Vol. III, pp. 228 ff.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., The clergy.

<sup>3</sup> *Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved*, above, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> An "evangelical counsel," necessary for perfection, but not demanded. Cf. Vol. III, pp. 229, 233.

things and let all things go. Upon this I based the article that Pope Leo condemned. He did it the more gladly because I took the rogue's-cloak off the Roman knavery.

For the popes had never seriously intended to make war on the Turk, but used the Turkish war as a conjurer's hat, playing around in it, and robbing Germany of money by means of indulgences, whenever they took the notion.<sup>1</sup> All the world knew it, but now it is forgotten. Thus they condemned my article not because it prevented the Turkish war, but because it tore off this conjurer's hat and blocked the path along which the money went to Rome. If they had seriously wished to fight against the Turk, the pope and the cardinals would have had enough from the pallia,<sup>2</sup> annates,<sup>3</sup> and other unmentionable sources of income, so that they would not have needed to practice such extortion and robbery in Germany. If there had been a general opinion that a serious war was at hand, I could have dressed my article up better and made some distinctions.

It did not please me, either, that the Christians and the princes were driven, urged, and irritated into attacking the Turk and making war on him, before they amended their own ways and lived like true Christians. These two points, or either separately, were enough reason to dissuade from war. For I shall never advise a heathen or a Turk, let alone a Christian, to attack another or begin war. That is nothing else than advising bloodshed and destruction, and it brings no good fortune in the end, as I have written in the book *On Soldiers*;<sup>4</sup> and it never does any good when one knave punishes another without first becoming good himself.

But what moved me most of all was this. They undertook to fight against the Turk under the name of Christ, and taught men and stirred them up to do this, as though our people were an army of Christians against the Turks, who were enemies of Christ; and this is straight against Christ's doctrine and name. It is against His doctrine, because He says that Christians shall not resist evil, shall not fight or

The Pope  
and the  
Turkish  
War

Chris-  
tians  
Must  
Not  
Fight as  
Chris-  
tians  
Matt.  
5:39

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. II, pp. 84 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 89, note 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 84, note.

<sup>4</sup> Above, pp. 32 f.

quarrel, not take revenge or insist on rights. It is against His name, because in such an army there are scarcely five Christians, and perhaps worse people in the eyes of God than are the Turks; and yet they would all bear the name of Christ. This is the greatest of all sins and one that no Turk commits, for Christ's name is used for sin and shame and thus dishonored. This would be especially so if the pope and the bishops were in the war, for they would put the greatest shame and dishonor on Christ's name, since they are called to fight against the devil with the Word of God and with prayer, and would be deserting their calling and office and fighting with the sword against flesh and blood. This they are not commanded, but forbidden to do.

O how gladly would Christ receive me at the Last Judgment, if when summoned to the spiritual office, to preach and care for souls, I had left it and busied myself with fighting and with the temporal sword! And how should Christ come to it that He or His have anything to do with the sword and go to war, and kill men's bodies, when He glories in it that He has come to save the world, not to kill people? For His work is to deal with the Gospel and by His Spirit to redeem men from sin and death, nay, to help them from this world to everlasting life. According to John vi, He fled and would not let Himself be made king; before Pilate He confessed, "My kingdom is not of this world"; and He bade Peter, in the garden, put up his sword, and said, "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword."

John 3:17  
John 6:15  
John 18:36  
Matt. 26:52

I say this not because I would teach that worldly rulers ought not be Christians, or that a Christian cannot bear the sword and serve God in temporal government. Would God they were all Christians, or that no one could be a prince unless he were a Christian! Things would be better than they now are and the Turk would not be so powerful. But what I would do is keep the callings and offices distinct and apart, so that everyone can see to what he is called, and fulfill the duties of his office faithfully and with the heart, in the service of God. Of this I have written more than enough



elsewhere, especially in the books *On Soldiers*<sup>1</sup> and *On Temporal Government*.<sup>2</sup> For Paul will not suffer it that in the Church, where all should be Christians, one assume another's office (Romans xii and Corinthians I xii), but exhorts every member to his own work, so that no disorder arise, but everything be done in an orderly way. How much less, then, is the disorder to be tolerated that arises when a Christian leaves his office and takes upon him a temporal office, or when a bishop or pastor leaves his office and takes upon him the office of a prince or judge; or, on the other hand, when a prince takes up the office of a bishop and lets his princely office go? Even today this shameful disorder rages and rules in the whole papacy, contrary to their own canons and laws.

Inquire of experience how well we have succeeded hitherto with the Turkish war, though we have fought as Christians until we have lost Rhodes<sup>3</sup> and almost all of Hungary and much German land besides. And that we may perceive clearly that God is not with us in our war against the Turks, He has never put so much courage or spirit into the minds of our princes that they have been able even once to deal seriously with the Turkish war. Though many of the diets, almost all of them in fact, have been called and held on this account,<sup>4</sup> the matter will neither be settled nor arranged, and it seems as though God were mocking our diets and letting the devil hinder them and get the better of them until the Turk comes ravaging on at his leisure and ruins Germany without trouble and without resistance. Why does this happen? Because my article, which Pope Leo condemned, remains uncondemned and in full force. Because the papists reject it, arbitrarily and without Scripture, the Turk must take its part and prove it with the fist and with deeds. If we will not learn out of the Scriptures, we must learn out of the Turk's scabbard, until we find in our hurt that Christians

Learn-  
ing  
from  
Experi-  
ence

<sup>1</sup> Above, pp. 32 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. III, pp. 228 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Captured from the Hospitallers, December, 1522.

<sup>4</sup> The diets of Nuremberg (1523 and 1524) and of Spire (1526 and 1529) discussed the Turkish war at length.

are not to make war or resist evil. Fools must be chased with clubs.

The  
Clergy  
Have  
Caused  
Defeats

How many wars, think you, have there been against the Turk in which we would not have received heavy losses, if the bishops and clergy were there? How pitifully the fine king Lassla, with his bishops was beaten by the Turk at Varna.<sup>1</sup> The Hungarians themselves blamed Cardinal Julian<sup>2</sup> and killed him for it. Recently King Ludwig<sup>3</sup> would perhaps have fought with more success, if he had not led a priests' army or, as they call it, a Christian army against the Turks. If I were emperor, king, or prince in a campaign against the Turk, I would exhort my bishops and priests to stay at home and mind the duties of their office, praying, fasting, saying mass, preaching, and caring for the poor, as not only Holy Scripture, but their own canon law teaches and requires. If, however, they were to be disobedient to God and their own law and desire to go along to war, I would teach them by force to attend to their office and not, by their disobedience, put me and my army under God's wrath and into danger. It would be less harmful to have three devils in the army than one disobedient, apostate bishop, who had forgotten his office and assumed that of another. For there can be no good fortune with such people around, who go against God and their own law.

I have heard of fine soldiers who have thought that the king of France, when he was defeated and captured by the emperor before Pavia, had all of his bad fortune because he had the pope's, or as they boastfully call them, the Church's, people with him. For after they came to his camp with a great cry of *Ecclesia, ecclesia!* "Church, Church!" there was no more good fortune there. This is what the soldiers say, though perhaps they do not know the reason for it, viz., that is not right for the pope, who wants to be a

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<sup>1</sup> Wladislaw (Ladislas) III of Poland and Hungary, killed in the battle of Varna, November 10, 1444.

<sup>2</sup> Giuliano Cæsarini, papal legate in Hungary, who had preached the crusade. He was present at the battle of Varna, and killed during the retreat after the battle.

<sup>3</sup> King Lewis II of Bohemia and Hungary was killed in the battle of Mohacs, August 29, 1525.

Christian, and the highest and best Christian preacher at that, to lead a church army, or army of Christians. For the Church ought not strive or fight with the sword; it has other enemies than flesh and blood, their name is the wicked devils in the air; therefore it has other weapons and swords and other wars, so that it has enough to do, and cannot mix in the wars of the emperor or princes, for the Scriptures say that there shall be no good fortune where men are disobedient to God.

Eph.  
6:12

I Sam.  
12:15

Again, if I were a soldier and saw in the field a priests' banner, or banner of the cross, even though it were a crucifix I should run as though the devil were chasing me; and even if they won a victory, by God's decree, I should not take any part in the booty or the rejoicing. Even the wicked iron-eater, Pope Julius,<sup>1</sup> who was half devil, did not succeed, but had to call at last on the Emperor Maximilian and let him take charge of the game, despite the fact that Julius had more money, arms, and people. I think, too, that this latest pope, Clement,<sup>2</sup> whom people held almost a god of war, succeeded well with his fighting until he lost Rome and all its wealth to a few ill-armed soldiers. The conclusion is this: Christ will teach them to understand my article, that Christians shall not make war, and the condemned article must take its revenge, for it is said of Christians and will be uncondemned and right and true; although they do not care and do not believe it, but rush on more and more, hardened and unrepentant, and go to destruction. To this I say Amen, Amen.

It is true, indeed, that since they have temporal lordship and wealth, they ought to make out of it the same contributions to the emperor, kings, or princes that other holdings properly make, and render the same services that others are expected to render. Nay, these "goods of the Church," as they call them, ought above all others to serve and help in the protection of the needy and the welfare of all classes, for they are given for that purpose, not in order that a bishop may forget his office and use them for war or battle. If the

<sup>1</sup> Julius II (1503-13).

<sup>2</sup> Clement VII (1523-30). Rome was sacked by the army of Charles V, May 6, 1527. When Luther wrote this the pope was the emperor's prisoner.

banner of Emperor Charles or of a prince is in the field, then let everyone run boldly and gladly to the banner to which his allegiance is sworn; but if the banner of a bishop, cardinal, or pope is there, then run the other way, and say "I do not know this coin; if it were a prayer book, or the Holy Scriptures preached in the Church, I would rally to it."

**How to  
Fight  
the  
Turk**

**Matt.  
5: 45**

Now before I exhort or urge to war against the Turk, hear me, for God's sake, while I first teach you how to fight with a good conscience. For although, if I wanted to give way to the old Adam, I could keep quiet and look on while the Turk revenged me upon the tyrants who persecute the Gospel and subject me to all kinds of pain, and paid them back for it, nevertheless, I shall not do this, but rather serve both friends and enemies, so that my sun may rise on both bad and good, and my rain fall on the thankful and unthankful.

**Isa. 10:5**

In the first place, it is certain that the Turk has no right or command to begin war and to attack lands that are not his. Therefore, his war is nothing else than outrage and robbery, with which God is punishing the world, as He often does through wicked knaves, and sometimes through godly people. For he does not fight from necessity or to protect his land in peace, as the right kind of a ruler does, but like a pirate or highwayman, he seeks to rob and damage other lands, who are doing and have done nothing to him. He is God's rod and the devil's servant; there is no doubt about that.

**The  
Devil  
Must be  
Smitten**

In the second place, it must be known that the man, whoever he is, who is going to make war against the Turk, must be sure that he has a commission from God and is doing right. He must not plunge in for the sake of revenge or have some other mad notion or reason. He must be sure of this, so that, win or lose, he may be in a state of salvation and in a godly occupation. There are two of these men, and there ought to be only two: the one is named Christian, the other Emperor Charles.

Christian should be first, with his army. For since the Turk is the rod of the wrath of the Lord our God and the

servant of the raging devil, the first thing to be done is to smite the devil, his lord, and take the rod out of God's hand, so that the Turk may be found in his own strength only, all by himself, without the devil's help and without God's hand. This should be done by Sir Christian, that is, the pious, holy, dear body of Christians. They are the people who have the arms for this war and know what to do with them. If the Turk's god, the devil, is not first beaten, there is reason to fear that the Turk will not be so easy to beat. Now the devil is a spirit, who cannot be beaten with armor, guns, horses, and men, and God's wrath cannot be allayed by them, as it is written in Psalm xxxiii, "The Lord hath no pleasure in the strength of the horse, neither delighteth he in any man's legs; the Lord delighteth in them that fear him and wait for his goodness." Christian weapons and power must do it.

Ps. 33:17  
Ps.  
147:10

Here you ask, "Who are the Christians and where does one find them?" Answer: They are not many, but they are everywhere, though they are spread out thin and live far apart, under good and bad princes. Christendom must continue to the end, as the article of the Creed says, "I believe one holy Christian Church." But if that is true, it must be possible to find them. Every pastor and preacher ought to exhort his people most diligently to repentance and to prayer. They ought to drive men to repentance by showing our great and numberless sins and our ingratitude, by which we have earned God's wrath and disfavor, so that He justly gives us into the hands of the devil and the Turk. That this preaching may work the more strongly, they ought to cite examples and sayings out of the Scriptures, such as the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the children of Israel, and show how cruelly and how often God punished the world, and its lands and peoples; and they ought to make it plain that it is no wonder, since we sin more heavily than they did, if we are punished worse than they.

Verily, this fight must be begun with repentance, and we must reform our lives, or we shall fight in vain; as the prophet Jeremiah says in the xviii chapter, "I will speak at one time against a kingdom to pluck it up, destroy it, and

Men  
Must  
Repent

Jer. 18:  
7 ff.

scatter it; but if that people against which I speak repent, I will repent me of the evil that I thought to do it; again I speak of a kingdom and people to plant and build it, but if it do evil in my sight, and hear not my voice, I will repent me of the good that I had said I would do it. Therefore, speak to them of Judah and them of Jerusalem, and say, Behold I prepare a calamity for you and think evil against you; let each of you, then, turn from his evil way and make your deeds good." This saying we may apply to ourselves as though it had been spoken to us, for God devises an evil against us because of our wickedness and certainly prepares the Turk against us, as He says also in Psalm vii, "If a man turn not, he hath whetted his sword and stretched his bow, and aimed it, and laid a deadly bolt in it."

Ps. 7:  
12ff.

Along with these must be cited the words and illustrations of Scripture in which God makes it known how well He is pleased with true repentance or amendment, made in faith and reliance on His Word,—such as, in the Old Testament the examples of Kings David, Ahab, Mannasseh, and the like; in the New Testament of St. Peter, the malefactor, the publican in the Gospel, and so forth. Although I know that to the scholars and saints, who need no repentance, this advice of mine will be laughable and that they hold it for a simple and common thing which they have long since got beyond; nevertheless, I have not been willing to omit for the sake of myself and sinners like myself, who need both repentance and exhortation to repentance every day. In spite of it, we remain all too lazy and lax, and have not, with those "ninety and nine just persons," got so far over the hill as they permit themselves to think they have.

Luke  
15:7

They  
Must  
Pray

After people have been thus taught and exhorted to confess their sin and amend their ways, they should then be exhorted with the utmost diligence to prayer, and shown how such prayer pleases God, how He has commanded it and promised to hear it, and that no one ought to think lightly of his own praying, or have doubts about it, but be sure, with firm faith, that it will be heard; all of which has been published by us in many tracts. For the man who doubts, or prays at a venture, would do better to let it alone, because

such prayer is merely a tempting of God and only makes things worse. Therefore, I would advise against processions,<sup>1</sup> which are a heathenish and useless practice, for they are pomp and show rather than prayer. It might, indeed, be of some use to have the people, especially the young people, sing the Litany at mass or vespers or in the church after the sermon, provided that everyone, at home, by himself, constantly raised to Christ at least a sigh of the heart for grace to lead a better life and for help against the Turk. I am not speaking of much long praying, but of frequent brief sighs, in one or two words, such as "O help us, dear God the Father; have mercy on us, dear Lord Jesus Christ!" or the like.

Lo, this kind of preaching will strike the Christians and find them out, and there will be Christians who will accept it and act according to it; it matters not if you do not know who they are. The tyrants and bishops may also be exhorted to desist from their raging and persecution against the Word of God and not to hinder our prayer; but if they do not desist, we must not cease to pray, but keep on, and take the chance that they will have the benefit of our prayer and be preserved along with us, or that we shall pay for their raging and be ruined along with them. They are so perverse and blind that if God gave good fortune against the Turk, they would ascribe it to their holiness and merit and boast of it against us. On the other hand, if things turned out badly, they would ascribe it to no one but us, and lay the blame on us, disregarding the shameful, openly sinful, and wicked life, which they not only lead, but defend; for they cannot teach rightly a single point about the way to pray, and they are worse than the Turks.<sup>2</sup> Ah, well We must leave that to God's judgment!

In this exhortation to prayer, also, we must introduce sayings and examples from the Scriptures, in which it is shown how strong and mighty a man's prayer has sometimes been; for example, Elijah's prayer, which St. James praises; Jas. 5:17

<sup>1</sup> The ceremonial processions were regarded as especially solemn forms of prayer. See *Cath. Encyc.*, XII, 446 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 82.

I Kings 17:1 the prayers of Elisha and other prophets; of Kings David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jesis,<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah, etc.; the story of how God promised Abraham that He would spare the land of Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of five righteous men; for the prayer of righteous men can do much if it be persistent, says St. James in his Epistle. They are to be informed, besides, that they shall be careful not to anger God by not praying, and not to fall under His judgment, in Ezekiel xiii, where God says, "Ye have not set yourselves against me, and opposed yourselves as a wall before the house of Israel, to stand against the battle in the day of the Lord"; and in xxii, "I sought a man among them who would be a wall, and stand against me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I poured my wrath upon them and consumed them with the fire of my anger and paid them as they deserved, saith the Lord."

Gen.  
18:32

Jas. 5:16

Ezek.  
13:5

Ezek.  
23:30f.

From this it is easy to see that God would have men set themselves in the way of his wrath and keep it off, and that He is greatly angered if this is not done. That is what I meant when I spoke above<sup>2</sup> about taking the rod out of God's hands. Let him fast who will. Let him go down on his knees and bow and fall to the ground, if he is in earnest; for the bowing and kneeling that has been practiced hitherto in the chapters and monasteries was not in earnest; it was, and still is, mere apéry. It is not for nothing that I exhort pastors and preachers to impress this upon the people, for I see plainly that it rests entirely with the preachers whether the people shall amend their ways and pray, or not. Little will be accomplished by preaching in which men call Luther names and blaspheme, and let repentance and prayer alone; but where God's Word is spoken, it is not without fruit. They, however, must preach as though they were preaching to saints who had learned all that there was to know about repentance and faith, and therefore had to talk about something higher.

We should have been moved to this prayer against the Turk by the great need of our time, for the Turk, as has

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps Josiah or Joash.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 89.



been said, is the servant of the devil, who not only ruins land and people with the sword, as we shall hear later, but also lays waste the Christian Faith and our dear Lord Jesus Christ. For although some praise his government because he allows everyone to believe what he will so long as he remains the temporal lord, yet this praise is not true, for he does not allow Christians to come together in public, and no one can openly confess Christ or preach or teach against Mohammed. What kind of freedom of belief is it when no one is allowed to preach or confess Christ, and yet our salvation depends on that confession as Paul says, "To confess with the lips saves," and Christ has strictly commanded to confess and teach His Gospel.

The  
Turk  
an  
Enemy  
of Christ

Rom.  
10:9

Matt.  
10:32

Since, therefore, faith must be kept quiet and held secret among this barbarous and wild people and under this severe rule, how can it at last exist or remain, when there is need for so much trouble and labor, in places where it is preached most faithfully and diligently? Therefore, it happens, and must happen, that those Christians who are captured or otherwise get into Turkey fall away and become altogether Turkish, and it is very seldom that one remains true to his faith, for they lack the living bread of souls and see the free and fleshly life of the Turks and are obliged to adapt themselves to it.

How can one injure Christ more than with these two things; namely, force and wiles? With force, they prevent preaching and suppress the Word. With wiles, they daily put wicked and dangerous examples before men's eyes and draw men to them. If we then would not lose our Lord Jesus Christ, His Word and faith, we must pray against the Turks as against other enemies of our salvation and of all good. Nay, as we pray against the devil himself.

In this connection, the people should be told of all the dissolute life and ways that the Turk practices, so that they may the better feel the need of prayer. To be sure, it has often disgusted me and still does, that neither our great lords nor our scholars have been at any pains to give us any certain knowledge about the life of the Turks in the two

The  
Wicked  
Life of  
the  
Turk

classes, spiritual and temporal; and yet he has come so near to us. For it is said that they too have chapters and monasteries. Some indeed have invented outrageous lies about the Turks in order to stir up us Germans against them, but there is no need for lies; the truth is all too great. I will tell my dear Christians a few things, so far as I know the real truth, so that they may the better be moved and stirred up to pray earnestly against the enemy of Christ our Lord.

I have some pieces of Mohammed's Koran which might be called in German a book of sermons or doctrines of the kind that we call pope's decretals. When I have time, I must put it into German so that every man may see what a foul and shameful book it is.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, he praises Christ and Mary very much as those who alone were without sin, and yet he believes nothing more of Christ than that he is a holy prophet, like Jeremiah or Jonah, and denies that he is God's Son and true God. Besides, he does not believe that Christ is the Saviour of the world, Who died for our sins, but that He preached to His own time, and completed His work before His death, just like any other prophet.

On the other hand, he praises and exalts himself highly and boasts that he has talked with God and the angels, and that since Christ's office of prophet is now complete, it has been commanded to him to bring the world to his faith and if the world is not willing, to compel it or punish it with the sword; and there is much glorification of the sword in it. Therefore, the Turks think their Mohammed much higher and greater than Christ, for the office of Christ has ended and Mohammed's office is still in force.

From this anyone can easily observe that Mohammed is a destroyer of our Lord Christ and His kingdom, and if anyone denies concerning Christ, that He is God's Son and has died for us, and still lives and reigns at the right hand of God, what has he left of Christ? Father, Son, Holy Ghost, Baptism, the Sacrament, Gospel, Faith and all Christian doctrine and life are gone, and there is left, instead of Christ,

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<sup>1</sup> This purpose was not fulfilled, partly because of Luther's difficulty in securing a Latin text. See Berlin Ed., vii, 456, n. 1.

nothing more than Mohammed with his doctrine of works and especially of the sword. That is the chief doctrine of the Turkish faith in which all abominations, all errors, all devils are piled up in one heap.

And yet, the world acts as though it were snowing pupils of the Turkish faith, for it pleases the reason extraordinarily well that Christ should not be God, as the Jews also believe, and especially is Reason pleased with the thought that men are to rule and bear the sword and get up in the world; then the devil pushes it along. Thus a faith is patched together out of the faith of Jews, Christians and heathen. He gets it from the Christians when he praises Christ and Mary and the apostles and other saints. He gets it from the Jews that people are not to drink wine, are to fast the certain times of the year, wash like the Nazarites, and eat off the ground, and go on with such holy works as part of our monks do and hope for everlasting life at the Judgment Day, for, holy people that they are, they believe in the resurrection of the dead, though few of the papists believe in it.

What pious Christian heart would not be horrified at this enemy of Christ, since we see that the Turk allows no article of our faith to stand, except the single one about the resurrection of the dead? Then Christ is no redeemer, saviour, or king; there is no forgiveness of sins, no grace, no Holy Ghost. Why should I say much? In the article that Christ is to be beneath Mohammed, and less than he, everything is destroyed. Who would not rather be dead than live under such a government, where he must say nothing about his Christ, and hear and see such blasphemy and abomination against Him? Yet it takes such a powerful hold, when it wins a land, that people even submit to it willingly. Therefore, let everyone pray who can pray that this abomination may not become lord over us and that we may not be punished with this terrible rod of God's anger.

In the second place, the Turk's Koran, or creed, teaches him to destroy not only the Christian faith, but also the whole temporal government. His Mohammed, as has been said, commands that ruling is to be done by the sword, and

**The  
Turk  
an  
Enemy  
of Gov-  
ernment**

in his Koran the sword is the commonest and noblest work. Thus the Turk is, in truth, nothing but a murderer or highwayman, as his deeds show before men's eyes. St. Augustine<sup>1</sup> calls other kingdoms, too, great robbery; Psalm lxxvi also calls them "fastnesses of robbers,"<sup>2</sup> because it is but seldom that an empire has come up except by robbery, force, and wrong; or at the very least, it is often seized and possessed by wicked people without any justice, so that the Scriptures, in Genesis x, call the first prince upon earth, Nimrod, a mighty hunter. But never has any kingdom come up and become so mighty by murder and robbery as that of the Turk; and he murders and robs every day, for it is commanded in their law, as a good and divine work, that they shall rob and murder, devour and destroy more and more those that are round about them; and they do this, and think that they are doing God service. Their government, therefore, is not a regular rulership, like others, for the maintenance of peace, the protection of the good, and the punishment of the wicked, but a rod of anger and a punishment of God upon the unbelieving world, as has been said. The work of murdering and robbing pleases the flesh in any case, because it enables men to gain high place and subject everyone's life and goods to themselves; how much more must the flesh be pleased when this is a commandment, as though God would have it so and it pleased Him well! Therefore among the Turks, too, they are held the best who are diligent to increase the Turkish kingdom and who are constantly murdering and robbing round about them.

This second thing must follow out of the first;<sup>3</sup> for Christ says, in John viii, that the devil is a liar and murderer. With lies he kills souls, with murder bodies. If he wins with a lie, he does not take a holiday and make delay, but follows it up with murder. Thus when the spirit of lies had taken possession of Mohammed and the devil had murdered men's souls with his Koran and had destroyed the faith of Chris-

<sup>1</sup>De civitate dei IV, 4, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Raubeberge, "mountains of prey" (Engl. R. V.)

<sup>3</sup>i.e., The murdering and robbing out of the false doctrine.

tians, he had to go on and take the sword and attempt the murder of their bodies. The Turkish faith, then, has not made its progress by preaching and the working of miracles, but by the sword and by murder, and its success has been due to God's wrath, which ordered that, since all the world has a desire for the sword and robbery and murder, one should come who would give it enough of murder and robbery.

All fanatics, as a rule, when the spirit of lies has taken possession of them and led them away from the true faith, have been unable to stop there, but have followed the lie with murder and taken up the sword, as a sign that they were children of the father of all lies and murder. Thus we read how the Arians became murderers and one of the greatest bishops of Alexandria, Lucius<sup>1</sup> by name, drove the orthodox out of the city, and went into the ship and held a naked sword in his own hand until the orthodox were all on board and had to go away; and these tender, holy bishops committed many other murders even at that time, which is almost twelve hundred years ago. Again, in the time of St. Augustine, which is almost eleven hundred years ago, the holy father shows, in his books, how many murders were committed by the Donatists.<sup>2</sup> In such an utterly worldly way did the clergy conduct themselves! They had only the name and guise of bishops among the Christians; but because they had fallen away from the truth and become subject to the spirit of lies, they had to go forward in his service and become wolves and murderers. Even in our own times, what was Muenzer seeking, except to become a new Turkish emperor? He was possessed of the spirit of lies and therefore there was no holding him back; he had to go at the other work of the devil, take the sword and murder and rob, as the spirit of murder drove him, and he created such a rebellion and such misery.

Lies and  
Murder  
Go To-  
gether

And what shall I say of the most holy Father, the pope?

<sup>1</sup> In 374, the Arian bishop, Lucius, drove the orthodox bishop, Peter, out of Alexandria. Realecyk II, 42; Bright, *Age of the Fathers*, I, 377.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Contra Gaudentium*, I, c. 22 (Migne xliii, 720 f.) See Bright, *Age of the Fathers* II, 117.

Is it not true that he and his bishops have become worldly lords, have fallen away from the Gospel, led by the spirit of lies, and embraced their own human doctrine, and thus have practiced murder, down to the present hour? Read the histories of the time and you find that the principal business of popes and bishops has been to set emperors, kings, princes, lands, and people against one another, even themselves to fight and help in the work of murder and bloodshed. Why so? Because the spirit of lies never acts any other way. After he has made his disciples teachers of lies and deceivers, he has no rest until he makes them murderers, robbers, and blood-dogs. For who has ordered them to bear the sword, to make war, and to urge men on and stir them up to murder and war, when their duty was to attend to preaching and prayer?

Matt.  
7:16

II Thess.  
2:4

They call me and mine seditious, but when have I ever coveted the sword or urged men to take it, and not rather taught and kept peace and obedience, except that I have instructed and exhorted the regular temporal rulers to do their duty and maintain peace and justice? By its fruits one shall know the tree. I and mine keep and teach peace; the pope, with his followers, makes war, murders, robs, and that not only his enemies; but he burns, condemns, and persecutes the innocent, the pious, the orthodox, as a true Antichrist. For he does this, "sitting in the temple of God," as head of the Church; and that the Turk does not do. But as the pope is Antichrist, so the Turk is the very devil. The prayer of Christendom is against both. Both shall go down to hell, even though it may take the Last Day to send them there; and I hope it will not be long.

Summing up what has been said: Where the spirit of lies is, there is also the spirit of murder, though he may not get to work or may be hindered. If he is hindered, he still laughs and is jubilant when murder is done, and at least consents to it, for he holds it right. But good Christians do not rejoice over any murder, not even over the misfortunes of their enemies. Since, then, Mohammed's Koran is

such a great spirit of lies that it leaves almost nothing of Christian truth remaining, how could it have any other result than that it should become a great and mighty murderer, with both lies and murders under the show of truth and righteousness. As, therefore, lies destroy the spiritual order of faith and truth, so murder destroys all temporal order instituted by God; for where murder and robbery are practiced, it is impossible that there should be a fine, praiseworthy temporal government, since they cannot think more highly of peace than of war and murder, or attend to the pursuits of peace, as one can see in soldiers. Therefore, the Turks do not regard the work of agriculture highly.

The third point is that Mohammed's Koran thinks nothing of marriage, but permits everyone to take wives as he will. Therefore, it is customary among the Turks for one man to have ten or twenty wives and to desert or sell any of them that he will, when he will, so that in Turkey women are held immeasurably cheap and are despised; they are bought and sold like cattle. Although there may be some few who do not take advantage of this law, nevertheless this is the law and anyone can follow if he will. Such a way of living is not marriage and cannot be marriage, because none of them takes a wife or has a wife with the intention of staying with her forever, as though the two were one body, as God's Word says, in Genesis iii, "The man shall cleave to his wife and they two be one body." Thus the marriage of the Turks closely resembles the chaste life that the soldiers live with their harlots; for the Turks are soldiers and must act like soldiers; Mars and Venus, say the poets,<sup>1</sup> must be together.

The  
Turk  
the  
Enemy  
of Mar-  
riage

Gen.  
2:24

These three points I have wanted to mention. I am sure of them from the Koran of the Turks. What I have heard beside I will not bring forward, because I cannot be sure about it. Suppose, then, that there are some Christians among the Turks; suppose that some of them are monks; suppose that some are honorable laymen; even then, what

<sup>1</sup>Ovid, *Trist.* 2, 295; Weimar Ed., XXX<sup>2</sup>, p. 127, n. 1

good can there be in the government and the whole Turkish way of life, when according to their Koran these three things rule among them; namely, lying, murder, and disregard of marriage, and besides, every one must keep Christian truth quiet and dare not rebuke or try to reform these three points, but must look on and consent to them, as I fear, at least so far as to be silent? How can there be a more horrible, dangerous, terrible imprisonment than a life under such a government? Lies destroy the spiritual estate, murder the temporal, disregard of marriage the estate of matrimony. Now take out of the world *veram religionem*, *veram politiam*, *veram oeconomiam*, i.e., true spiritual life, true temporal government, and true conduct of the home; what is left in the world, but flesh, world and devil? A life there is like the life of the "good fellows" who keep house with harlots.

It is said, indeed, that the Turks are, among themselves, faithful and friendly and careful to tell the truth. I believe that, and I think that they probably have more fine virtues in them than that. No man is so bad that there is not something good in him. Now and then a woman of the streets has good qualities that scarcely ten honorable matrons have. So the devil would have a cloak and be a fair angel, an angel of light; therefore he hides behind certain works, that are works of the light. Murderers and robbers are more faithful and friendly to each other than neighbors are, nay, more so than many Christians. For if the devil keeps the three things—lies, murder, and disregard of marriage—as the real foundation of hell, he can easily tolerate, nay, help, that fleshly love and faithfulness shall be built upon it, as precious stones (though they are nothing but hay and straw), though he knows well that nothing of them will remain through the fire.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, where true faith, true government, true marriage are, he tries earnestly that little love and fidelity may appear and little be shown, so that he can put the foundation to shame and have it despised.

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<sup>1</sup> With this passage compare I Cor. 3: 11-15.



What is more, when the Turks go into battle their war-cry is no other word than "Allah! Allah!" and they shout it till heaven and earth resound. But in the Arabic language Allah means God, and is a corruption of the Hebrew Eloha. For they have taught in the Koran that they shall boast constantly with these words, "There is no God but God." All that is really a device of the devil. For what is it to say, "There is no God but God" without distinguishing one God from another? The devil, too, is a god and they honor him with this word; of that there is no doubt. In just the same way the pope's soldiers cry "Ecclesia! Ecclesia!" To be sure: the devil's ecclesia! Therefore I believe that the Turks' Allah does more in war than they themselves. He gives them courage and wiles, guides sword and fist, horse and man. What do you think, then, of the holy people who can call upon God in battle, and yet destroy Christ and all God's words and works, as you have heard?

It is part of the Turks' holiness, also, that they tolerate no images or pictures and are even holier than our destroyers of images. For our destroyers tolerate, and are glad to have, images on gulden, groschen, rings, and ornaments; but the Turk tolerates none of them and stamps nothing but letters on his coins. He is entirely Muenzerian, too, for he overthrows all rulers and tolerates no gradations of government, such as princes, counts, lords, nobles and other feudatories; but he alone is lord over all in his own land, and what he gives out is only pay, never property or rights of rulership. He is also a papist; for he believes that he will become holy and be saved by works, and thinks it no sin to overthrow Christ, lay government waste, and destroy marriage. All these things the pope also works at, though in other ways, with hypocrisy, while the Turk uses force and the sword. In a word, as has been said, it is the very dregs of all abominations and errors.

All this I have wanted to tell to the first man,<sup>1</sup> namely,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 88.

the community of Christians, so that he may know and see how much need there is for prayer, and how we must first smite the Turk's Allah, that is, his god, the devil, and strike down his power and godhead; otherwise, I fear, the sword will accomplish little. For this man is not to fight in a bodily way with the Turk, as the pope and his followers teach, nor resist him with the fist, but recognize the Turk as God's rod and anger, which Christians must either suffer, if God visits their sins upon them, or fight against and drive away with repentance, tears, and prayer. He who despises this counsel, let him despise it; I want to see what damage he will do the Turk.

## II. The Emperor

The second man whose place it is to fight against the Turk is Emperor Charles, or whoever is emperor; for the Turk attacks his subjects and his empire, and it is his duty, as a regular ruler appointed by God, to defend his own. I repeat it here, that I would not urge anyone or tell anyone to fight against the Turk unless the first method, mentioned above, had been followed, and men had first repented and been reconciled to God, etc. If anyone will go to war besides, let him take his risk. It is not proper for me to say anything more about it beyond telling everyone his duty and instructing his conscience.

I see clearly that kings and princes are taking such a silly and careless attitude toward the Turk that I fear they are despising God and the Turk too greatly, or do not know, perhaps, that the Turk is such a mighty lord that no kingdom or land, whatever it is, is strong enough to resist him alone, unless God will do a miracle.<sup>1</sup> Now I cannot expect any miracle or special grace of God for Germany, unless men amend their ways and honor the Word of God differently than has hitherto been done.

But enough has been said about that for those who will listen. We would now speak of the emperor.

In the first place, if there is to be war against the Turk,

<sup>1</sup> In the raising of the siege of Vienna in October, 1529, Luther saw such a miracle. See De Wette III, 518.

it should be fought at the emperor's command, under his banner, and in his name. Then everyone can assure his own conscience that he is obeying the ordinance of God, since we know that the emperor is our true overlord and head, and he who obeys him, in such a case, obeys God also, while he who disobeys him disobeys God also. If he dies in this obedience, he dies in a good state, and if he has previously repented and believes on Christ, he is saved. These things, I suppose, everyone knows better than I can teach him, and would to God they knew them as well as they think they do. Yet we will say something more about them.

War  
Should  
Be By  
His Com-  
mand

In the second place, this banner and obedience of the emperor ought to be true and simple. The emperor should seek nothing else than simply to perform the work and duty of his office, which is to protect his subjects; and those under his banner should seek simply the work and duty of obedience. By this simplicity you should understand that there is to be no fighting of the Turk for the reasons for which the emperors and princes have heretofore been urged to war, such as the winning of great honor, glory, and wealth, the increasing of lands, or wrath and revengefulness and other things of the kind; for by these things men seek only their own self-interest, and therefore we have had no good fortune heretofore, either in fighting or planning to fight against the Turk.

and:  
the Pro-  
tection  
of His  
Subjects

Therefore the urging and inciting, with which the emperor and the princes have heretofore been stirred up to fight against the Turk, ought to cease. He has been urged, as head of Christendom, as protector of the Church and defender of the faith, to wipe out the faith of the Turk, and the urging and exhorting have been based on the wickedness and vice of the Turks. Not so! The emperor is not head of Christendom or protector of the Gospel or of the faith. The Church and the faith must have another protector than emperor and kings. They are usually the worst enemies of Christendom and of the faith, as Psalm ii says and the Church constantly laments. With that kind of urging and

exhorting things are only made worse and God is the more deeply angered, because that interferes with His honor and His work, and would ascribe it to men, which is idolatry and blasphemy.

And if the emperor were to destroy the unbelievers and non-Christians, he would have to begin with the pope, bishops, and clergy and perhaps not spare us, or himself; for there is enough horrible idolatry in his own empire to make it unnecessary for him to fight the Turks for this cause. Among us there are Turks, Jews, heathen, non-Christians, all too many of them, proving it with public false doctrine and with offensive, shameful lives. Let the Turk believe and live as he will, just as one lets the papacy and other false Christians live. The emperor's sword has nothing to do with the faith; it belongs to physical, worldly things, if God is not to become angry with us. If we pervert His order and throw it into confusion, He, too, becomes perverse and throws us into confusion and all misfortune, as it is written, Ps. 18:26 "With the perverse thou art perverse." We can perceive and grasp this by means of the fortune we have heretofore had against the Turk. Think of all the heartbreak and misery that have been caused by the *c r u c i a t a*,<sup>1</sup> by the indulgences and crusading-taxes, with which Christians have been stirred up to take the sword and fight the Turk, when they ought to have been fighting the devil and unbelief with the Word and with prayer.

This is what should be done. The emperor and the princes should be exhorted concerning their office and their bounden duty to give serious and constant thought to governing their subjects in peace and to protecting them against the Turk. This would be their duty whether they themselves were Christians or not, though it would be very good if they were Christians. But since it is uncertain, and remains so, that they are Christians, and it is certain that they are emperors and princes, that is, that they have God's command to protect their subjects and are in duty bound to do so, therefore

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<sup>1</sup> The preaching of crusades.

we must let the uncertain go and hold to the certain, urge them with continual preaching and exhortation, and lay it heavily upon their consciences, that it is their duty to God not to let their subjects be so pitiably ruined, and that they are doing a great and notable sin when they do not think of their office and use all their power to bring counsel and help to those who should live, with body and goods, under their protection and who are bound to them with oaths of homage.

For I think (so far as I have yet observed the matter in our diets) that neither emperor nor princes believe themselves that they are emperor and princes. For they act as though it lay with their own judgment and pleasure whether they would rescue and protect their subjects from the power of the Turk or not; and the princes neither care nor think that they are bound and obligated before God to counsel and help the emperor in this matter with body and goods. Everyone of them lets it go as though it were no affair of his and as though he were forced neither by command or necessity, but it were left to his own free choice to do it or leave it. They are just like the common people who do not think it their duty to God and the world, when they have bright sons, to put them to school and have them study; but everyone thinks he has free power to raise his son as he pleases, no matter what God's word and ordinance are. Nay, the councilmen in the cities and almost all the rulers act in the same way, and let the schools go to nothing, as though they had no responsibility for them, and had an indulgence besides. No one remembers that God earnestly commands, and will have it so, that bright children shall be raised to His praise and for His work, which cannot be done without the schools. On the contrary everyone is in a hurry to have his children making a living, as though God and Christendom needed no pastors, preachers, carers for souls, and the worldly rulers no chancellors, counselors, or secretaries. But of this another time.<sup>1</sup> The pen must remain empress, or God will show us something else.

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<sup>1</sup> See *On Keeping Children in School*, Vol. IV, p. 135 ff.

Emperor, kings, and princes act the same way. They do not consider that God's commandment makes it necessary to protect their subjects; it is to lie in their own free choice to do it, if the notion sometime takes them, or they have leisure for it. Dear fellow, let us all do that! Let none of us look to that which is commanded him and which God orders him to do, but let all our actions and duties be matters of our own free will, and God will give us good fortune and His grace, and we shall be plagued by the Turk here in time, and by the devil yonder in eternity.

The  
Pope  
Should  
Be Out  
of It

Perhaps, then, a worthless prattler,—I should say a legate, —will come from Rome and exhort the estates of the empire and stir them up against the Turk, telling them how the enemy of the Christian faith has done such great harm to Christendom and that the emperor, as guardian of the Church and defender of the faith, should do so and so; as though they themselves were great friends of the Christian faith! But I say to him: You are a base-born knave, you impotent chatterer! For this way you accomplish nothing except to make the emperor feel that he should do a good Christian work that he is not commanded to do; and that rests with his free choice; his conscience is not touched at all by that, and he is not reminded of the necessary duty, laid upon him by God, but the whole thing is referred to his free will.

This is the way that a legate ought to deal with the estates of the empire at the diet. He should hold God's commandment before them and make of it an unavoidable necessity, and say: "Dear lords, emperor, and princes, if you would be emperor and princes, act as emperor and princes, or the Turk will teach you with God's wrath and disfavor. Germany, or the empire, is given you and committed to you by God, that you may protect, rule, counsel, and help it, and you not only should, but must do this on pain of losing your soul's salvation and God's favor and grace. But now it is evident that none of you takes this seriously, or believes it, but you take your office as a jest, as though it were a mummary of the carnival, for you leave the subjects, whom God has commit-

ted to you, to be so wretchedly harassed, taken captive, put to shame, plundered, slain, and sold by the Turk. Do you not think, since God has committed this office to you, and has given you money and people besides for you to do good to them, that He will demand at your hands all the subjects whom you so shamefully deserted, while you danced, revelled, showed off, and gambled? If you seriously believed that you were appointed and ordained of God to be emperor and princes, you would leave your banqueting and rivalry for high places and other unprofitable display for a while, and consult faithfully how you might discharge your office and fulfil God's commandment and rescue your consciences from all the blood and the misery which the Turk inflicts upon them. For how can God, or any godly heart think otherwise of you than that you hate your subjects or have a secret covenant with the Turk or, at least, hold yourselves for neither emperor nor princes, but for dolls and puppets for children to play with? Otherwise, it would be impossible that your consciences should let you rest, if you seriously held yourselves for overlords appointed by God, and were not to speak and advise together about these matters differently than you have done heretofore. In this you see that you are constantly becoming Turks to your own subjects.

"Nay, you even take up the case of Luther and discuss, in the devil's name, whether one can eat meat in the fast-times and nuns can take husbands, and things of that kind, which are not committed to you for discussion and about which God has given you no commandment; and meanwhile the serious and strict commandment of God hangs in the smoke, the commandment by which He has appointed you protectors of poor Germany; and you become murderers, betrayers, and blood-dogs to your own good, faithful, obedient subjects, and leave them to the Turk, nay, cast them into his jaws, as a reward for the bodies and money wealth and honor that they stake on you and reach out to you."

A good orator can here see well what I would like to say, if I were learned in the art of oratory, and what a legate

**The  
Imperial  
Banner**

should aim at and expound at the diet, if he would discharge his office honestly and faithfully.

For this reason I said above that Charles, or the emperor, should be the man to fight against the Turk, and that the fighting should be done under his banner. "O, that is easy! Everybody knew it long ago. Luther is not telling us anything new, but only worn-out old stuff." Nay, dear fellow, the emperor must truly see himself with other eyes than heretofore, and you must see his banner with other eyes. You and I are talking about the same emperor and the same banner, but you are not talking about the eyes that I am talking about. You must see on the banner the commandment of God that says, "Protect the good; punish the bad." Tell me how many there are who can read this on the emperor's banner, or who seriously believe it. Do you not think that their consciences would terrify them, if they saw this banner and had to own that they were greatly guilty before God on account of their failure to give help and protection to their faithful subjects? Dear fellow, a banner is not simply a piece of silk; there are letters on it, and on him who reads the letters luxury and banqueting should pall.

That it has been regarded heretofore as a mere piece of silk, is easy to prove, for otherwise the emperor would long ago have set it up, the princes would have followed it, and the Turk would not have become so mighty. But because the princes called it with their mouths the emperor's banner, and were disobedient to it with their fists, and held it by their deeds a mere piece of silk, those things have come to the pass that we now see with our own eyes. God grant that we are not, all of us, too late, I with my exhortation and the lords with their banner; and that it may not happen to us as it did to the children of Israel who would not fight against the Amorites when God first commanded them; afterwards, when they would have fought, they were beaten, because God would not be with them. Nevertheless, no one should despair; repentance and right conduct always find grace.

After emperor and princes remember that, by God's com-

Deut.  
1:26,  
41, 44



mandment, they owe their subjects this protection, they should be exhorted not to be presumptuous and undertake this work defiantly, or in reliance on their own might or planning; for there are many princes who say, "I have right and authority, therefore I will do it!" Then they pitch in, with pride and boasting of their might, and meet defeat at last; for if they did not feel their power, the matter of right would have small enough effect on them, as is proved in other cases, in which they pay no heed to right. It is not enough, then, for you to know that God has committed this or that to you; you should also do it with fear and humility, for God commands no one to do anything by his own wisdom or strength, but He, too, will have a part in it and be feared. Nay, He will do it through us, and will therefore have us pray to Him, and not become presumptuous or forget His help, as the Psalter says, "The Lord hath pleasure in those that fear Him and wait for His kindness." Otherwise we should persuade ourselves that we could do things and did not need God's help, and take to ourselves the victory and the honor that belong to Him.

Ps. 147:  
11

Therefore an emperor or prince ought to learn well that verse of the Psalter, in Psalm xlv, "I rely not upon my bow, and my sword helps me not, but thou helpst us from our enemies and putttest to shame them that hate us," and also the rest of what that Psalm says; and Psalm lx, "Lord God, thou goest not out with our host; give us aid in our need, for man's help is vain; with God we will do deeds; he shall tread down our enemies." These and like sayings have had to be fulfilled by many kings and great princes, from the beginning to the present day. They have become examples, though they had God's commandment and authority and right. Emperor and princes, therefore, should not let these sayings become a jest. Read here the apt illustration given in Judges xx, how the children of Israel were twice beaten by the Benjamites, despite the fact that God bade them fight and that they had the best of right. Their boldness and presumption were their downfall, as the text says, *Fidentes forti-*

Ps. 44:  
6f.

Ps. 60:  
10ff.

Judges  
20:18ff.

I Macc.  
3:19

tudine et numero.<sup>1</sup> It is true that one should have horses and men and weapons and everything that is needed for battle, if they are to be had, so that one is not tempting God; but when one has them, one must not be bold because of it, for God is not to be forgotten or despised, since it is written, "All victory comes from heaven."

If these two things are present, God's commandment and our humility, then there is no danger or need, so far as this second man, the emperor, is concerned; we are strong enough for the whole world and must have good fortune and success. But if we have not good fortune, it is certainly because one of the two things is lacking; we are going to war either without God's commandment, or in our own presumption, or the first soldier, the Christian, is not there with his prayers. It is not necessary here to warn against seeking honor or booty in war; for he who fights in humility and obedience to God's command, with his mind fixed solely upon the simple duty of protecting and defending his subjects, will forget honor and booty; nay, they will come to him, without his seeking, more richly and gloriously than he can wish.

Where  
Are the  
Soldiers  
to be  
Had?

Here someone will say, "Where shall we find pious fighting-men, who will act this way?" Answer: The Gospel is preached to all the world, and yet very few believe; nevertheless Christendom<sup>2</sup> believes and abides. Therefore I am writing this instruction with no hope that it will be accepted by all; indeed, most people will laugh and scoff at me. For me it is enough if, with this book, I shall be able to instruct some princes and their subjects; even though they may be very few in number, that does not matter to me; there will be victory and good fortune enough. And would to God that I had instructed only the emperor, or him who is to conduct the war in his name and at his command; I would then be of good hope. It has often happened, indeed, it usually

<sup>1</sup> "Trusting in bravery and numbers" (Judges 20:22). This is the Latin text. The English versions, and Luther's own Bible, follow the Hebrew and read, "The people encouraged themselves."

<sup>2</sup> Christenheit is Luther's name for the totality of Christians, without reference to social and political groupings in Church or State.

happens, God gives a whole land and kingdom good fortune and success through one single man; just as, on the other hand, through one knave at court He brings a whole land into all sorts of distress and misery; as Solomon says, in Ecclesiastes, "A single knave does great harm."

Ecc.  
9:18

Thus we read of Naaman, the captain of the king of Syria, that through this one man God gave the whole land good fortune and success. So through the holy Joseph He gave great good fortune to the whole kingdom of Egypt, and in IV Kings iii, Elisha says to Jehoram, "I would not look to thee, if Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, were not there," and thus the godless kings of Israel and Edom had to be helped for the sake of one godly man, when otherwise they would have been ruined in all kinds of distress; and in the book of Judges one can see the good that God did through Ehud, Gideon, Deborah, Samson, and other individuals, though the people were not worthy of it. See, on the other hand, what great harm Doeg did at the court of King Saul (I Kings xxii) and what Absalom accomplished against his father David, with the aid and counsel of Ahithophel (II Kings xv).

II Kings  
3:14

Gen.  
39:3

II Kings  
3:14

I Sam.  
22:18

II Sam.  
16:22ff.

I say this in order that it may not frighten us, or move us in any way, if the great majority are unbelieving and fight under the emperor's banner with an unchristian mind. We must remember, too, that Abraham, all by himself, was able to do much (Genesis xiv and xvii). It is certain, also, that among the Turks, who are the army of the devil, there is not one who is a Christian or has an humble and a right heart. In I Kings xiv, the godly Jonathan said, "It is not hard for God to give victory by many or by few," and himself inflicted on the Philistines a great slaughter such as Saul could not, with his whole army. It does not matter, therefore, if the crowd is not good, provided only that the head and some of the chief men are upright; it would be good, of course, if all were upright, but that is scarcely possible.

Gen. 14:  
17; 18:  
24ff.

I Sam  
14:6

Moreover, I hear it said that there are those in Germany who desire the coming of the Turk and his government, because they would rather be under the Turk than under the

emperor or princes. It would be hard to fight against the Turk with such people. Against them I have no better advice to give than that pastors and preachers be exhorted to be diligent in their preaching and faithful in instructing such people, pointing out to them the danger they are in and the wrong that they are doing, how they are making themselves partakers of great and numberless sins and loading themselves down with them in the sight of God, if they are found in this opinion. For it is misery enough to be compelled to suffer the Turk as overlord and to endure his government; but willingly to put oneself under it, or to desire it, when one need not and is not compelled,—the man who does that ought to be shown the sin he is committing and how terribly he is going on.

The  
Sin of  
Treason

Jer.  
21:7

In the first place, these people are faithless and guilty of perjury to their rulers, to whom they have taken oaths and done homage; and this is in God's sight a great sin that does not go unpunished. On account of such perjury the good king Zedekiah had to perish miserably, because he did not keep the oath that he gave to the heathen emperor at Babylon. Such people may think, or persuade themselves, that it is within their own power and choice to betake themselves from one lord to another, acting as though they were free to do or not to do what they pleased, forgetting and not remembering God's commandment and their oath, by which they are in duty bound to be obedient, until they are forcibly compelled to abandon it or are put to death for it; as the peasants thought, in the recent rebellion, and were beaten because of it. For just as a man may not slay himself, but endure until he is forcibly slain by others, so no one should evade his obedience or his oath, unless he is released from it by others, either by force or by favor and permission.<sup>1</sup>

The preachers must diligently impress this on such people; indeed their office of preaching compels them to do so, for it is their duty to warn their parishioners, and guard them against sin and harm to their souls. For one who willingly

<sup>1</sup> i.e., With the consent of the ruler to whom the oath of allegiance was given.

turns from his lord and takes the side of the Turk can never stay under the Turk with a good conscience, but his own heart will always speak to him and rebuke him thus,—“See, you were faithless to your overlord and deprived him of the obedience that you owed him, and robbed him of his right to rule over you; now, no sin can be forgiven unless stolen goods are restored; but how shall you make restitution to your lord, when you are under the Turk and cannot make restitution. One of two things, then, must happen;—either you must toil and labor forever, trying to get away from the Turk and back to your overlord; or your conscience must forever suffer compunction, pain and unrest (if, indeed, it does not result in despair and everlasting death), because you submitted to the Turk willingly and without necessity, against your sworn duty. In the latter case you must be among the Turks with your body, but over on this side with your heart and conscience. What have you gained then? Why did you not stay on this side from the first?”

In the second place, beside all that, such faithless, disloyal, perjured folk commit a still more horrible sin. They make themselves partakers of all the abominations and wickedness of the Turks; for he who willingly goes over to the Turks makes himself their comrade and an accomplice in all their doings. Now we have heard above what kind of man the Turk is, viz., a destroyer, enemy, and blasphemer of our Lord Jesus Christ, who instead of the Gospel and faith, sets up his shameful Mohammed and all kinds of lies, ruins all temporal government and home-life, or marriage, and, since his warfare is nothing but murder and bloodshed, is a tool of the devil himself. See, then! He who consorts with the Turk must be partaker of this terrible abomination and brings down on his own head all the murder, all the blood that the Turk has shed, and all the lies and vices with which he has damaged Christ's Kingdom and led souls astray. It is miserable enough if one is forced to be under this blood-dog and devil against his own will, and see and hear these abominations, and put up with them as the godly Lot had to do in

II Pet. 2:7f. Sodom, as St. Peter writes; it is not necessary to seek them of one's own accord, or desire them.

Nay, a man ought far rather die twice over in war, obedient to his overlord, than have, like a poor Lot, to be brought by force into such Sodoms and Gomorrahs. Still less ought a godly man long to go there of his own accord, in disobedience, and against God's commandment and his own duty. That would mean not only to become partaker in all the wickedness of the Turk and the devil, but to strengthen and further them; just as Judas not only made himself partaker of the wickedness of the Jews against Christ, but strengthened it and helped it along, while Pilate did not act as evilly as Judas, as Christ testifies in John xvii.

John  
19:11

In the third place, it is to be impressed by the preachers on the people that, if they do go over to the Turks, they will not have bettered themselves and their hopes and intentions will not be realized. For it is the Turk's way not to let any who are anything or have anything stay in the place where they live, but to put them far back in another land, where they are sold and must be servants. Thus they fulfill the proverb "Running out of the rain and falling in the water"; and "Lifting the plate and breaking the dish." Bad becomes worse; it scarcely serves them wrong. For the Turk is a true man of war, who has other ways of treating land and people, both in getting them and keeping them, than our emperor, kings, and princes have. He does not trust and believe these disloyal people and has the force to do as he will; thus he has not the same need of people that our princes have.

The preachers and pastors, I say, must impress this upon such disloyal people, with constant admonition and warning, for it is the truth, and it is needed. But if there are some who despise this exhortation and will not be moved by it, let them go on to the devil, as St. Paul had to let the Greeks, and St. Peter the Jews go; the others should not mind. Indeed, if it were to come to war, I would rather that none of these were under the emperor's banner, or stayed under it,

but were all on the Turk's side; they would be beaten all the sooner and in battle they would do the Turk more harm than good, for they are out of favor with God, the devil, and the world, and are surely, all of them, condemned to hell. It is good to fight against such people, who are plainly and surely damned both by God and the world. There are many depraved and abandoned and wicked men; but anyone with any sense will without doubt, heed such exhortation and be moved to stay in his obedience, and not throw his soul so carelessly into hell to the devil, but rather fight with all his might under his overlord, even though, in so doing, he is slain by the Turks.

But you say again, "If the pope is as bad as the Turk—and you yourself call him Antichrist, together with his clergy and his followers—then the Turk is as godly as the pope, for he acknowledges the four Gospels and Moses, together with the prophets; must we not, then, fight the pope as well as the Turk, or, perhaps, rather than the Turk?" Answer: I cannot deny that the Turk holds the four Gospels to be divine and true, as well as the prophets, and also speaks very highly of Christ and His mother, but at the same time, he believes that his Mohammed is above Christ and that Christ is not God, as has been said above. We Christians acknowledge the Old Testament as divine Scripture, but now that it is fulfilled and is, as St. Peter says, in Acts xv, too hard without God's grace, it is abolished and no longer binds us. Just so Mohammed treats the Gospel; he declares that it is indeed true, but has long since served its purpose; also that it is too hard to keep, especially on the points where Christ says that one is to leave all for His sake, love God with the whole heart, and the like. Therefore God has had to give another new law, one that is not so hard and that the world can keep, and this law is the Koran. But if anyone asks why he does no miracles to confirm this new law, he says that that is unnecessary and of no use, for people had many miracles before, when Moses' law and the Gospel arose, and did not believe. Therefore his Koran did not

The  
Turk  
and the  
Pope

Acts 15:  
10f.

need to be confirmed by wasted miracles, but by the sword, which is more effective than miracles. Thus it has been, and still is the case among the Turks, that everything is done with the sword, instead of with miracles.

On the other hand, the pope is not much more godly than Mohammed and resembles him extraordinarily; for he, too, praises the Gospel with his lips, but holds that many things in it are too hard, and these things are the very ones that Mohammed and the Turks also consider too hard, such as those contained in Matthew v. Therefore he interprets them, and makes of them *consilia*, i.e., "counsels," which no one is bound to keep unless he desires to do so, as has been shamelessly taught at Paris, and in other universities, foundations, and monasteries. Therefore, too, he does not rule with the Gospel, or Word of God, but has made a new law and a Koran, viz., his decretals, and enforces them with the ban, as the Turk enforces his Koran with the sword; he even calls the ban his spiritual sword, though only the Word of God is that and should be called that (Ephesians vi). Nevertheless, he uses the temporal sword also, when he can, or, at least, calls upon it, and urges and stirs up others to use it. And I am confident that if the pope could use the temporal sword as mightily as the Turk, he would perhaps lack the will to do so even less than the Turk and, indeed, they have often tried it.

God visits them with the same plague, too, and smites them with blindness, so that it happens to them as St. Paul says, in Romans i, about the shameful vice of the dumb sins, that God gives them up to a perverse mind because they pervert the Word of God. So blind and senseless are both pope and Turk that both of them commit the dumb sins shamelessly, as an honorable and praiseworthy thing. Since they think lightly of marriage, it serves them right that there are dog-marriages (and would to God they were dog-marriages), nay, "Italian marriages" and "Florentine brides" among them; and they think these things good; for I hear

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<sup>1</sup> Current names for unnatural vices.



one horrible thing after another about what an open and glorious Sodom Turkey is, and everybody who has looked around a little in Rome and Italy knows very well how God there revenges and punishes the prohibition of marriage, so that Sodom and Gomorrah, which God overwhelmed in days of old with fire and brimstone, must seem a mere jest compared with these abominations. On this one account, therefore, I would regret the rule of the Turk; nay, it would be intolerable in Germany.

"What are we to do, then? Are we to fight against the pope, as well as the Turk, since the one is as godly as the other?" Answer: Treat the one like the other and no one is wronged; like sin should receive like punishment. I mean that this way. If the pope and his followers were to attack the empire with the sword, as the Turk does, he should receive the same treatment as the Turk; and this is what was done to him by the army of Emperor Charles before Pavia.<sup>1</sup> For there stands God's verdict, "He that takes the sword shall perish by the sword." I do not advise that men go to war with the Turk or the pope because of his false belief or evil life, but because of the murder and destruction which he does. But the best thing about the papacy is that it has not yet the sword, as the Turk has; otherwise it would surely undertake to bring the whole world into subjection, though it would accomplish no more than to bring it to faith in the pope's Koran, the decretals. For he pays as little heed as the Turk to the Gospel, or Christian faith, and knows it as little, though with fasts, which he himself does not keep, he makes a great pretense of Turkish sanctity; thus they deserve the reputation of being like the Turk, though they are against Christ.

Matt.  
26:52

Against the papacy, however, because of its errors and wicked ways, the first man, Sir Christian,<sup>2</sup> has been aroused, and he attacks it boldly with prayer and the Word of God; and he has wounded it, too, so that they feel it and rage. But no raging helps; the axe is laid to the tree and the tree

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<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 58, 101, 110.

must be uprooted, unless it bears different fruit. I see clearly that they have no notion of reforming, but the farther things go, the more stubborn they become and want to butt their way through, and boast, "All or nothing, bishop or drudge!"<sup>1</sup> I consider them so godly that, unless they reform or turn from their shameful ways, both they themselves and the whole world admit that it is not to be endured, and that they should betake themselves to their comrade and brother, the holy Turk. Ah well! May our heavenly Father quickly hear their own prayer and grant that, as they say, they may be "all or nothing, bishop or drudge." Amen! They will have it so. Amen! So let it be, let it come true, as God pleases!

How Can  
the Em-  
peror  
Go to  
War?

But you say further: "How can the Emperor Charles fight against the Turk in these days, when he has against him such hindrances and such treachery from kings, princes, the Venetians, indeed from almost everybody?" Answer: What a man cannot lift, he must let lie. If we can do no more, we must let our Lord Jesus Christ counsel and aid us, by His coming, which cannot be far off.<sup>2</sup> For the world has come to its end; the Roman Empire is almost gone and torn to bits; it stands as the kingdom of the Jews stood when Christ's birth was near; the Jews had scarcely anything of their kingdom, Herod was the token of farewell. And so, I think, now that the Roman Empire is almost gone, Christ's coming is at the door, and the Turk is the Empire's token of farewell, a parting gift to the Roman Empire; and just as Herod and the Jews hated each other, though both made common cause against Christ, so Turk and papacy hate each other, but make common cause against Christ and His kingdom.

Nevertheless, what the emperor can do for his subjects against the Turk, that he should do, so that even though he cannot entirely prevent the abomination, he may yet try to protect and rescue his subjects by checking the Turk and holding him off. To this protection the emperor should be

<sup>1</sup> Drein odder druber, Bisschoff oder Bader.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. SMITH and JACOBS, *Luther's Correspondence II*, 516 f.

moved not only by his bounden duty, his office, and the command of God, nor only by the unchristian and vile government that the Turk brings in, as has been said above, but also by the misery and wretchedness that comes to his subjects. They know better than I, beyond all doubt, how cruelly the Turk treats those whom he carries away captive. He treats them like cattle, dragging, towing, driving those that can go along, and killing out of hand those that cannot go, whether they are young or old.

All this and the like more ought to move all the princes, and the whole empire, to forget their own cases and contentions, or let them rest for a while, and unite, in all earnest, to help the wretched; so that things may not go as they went with Constantinople and Greece. They quarreled with one another and looked after their own affairs, until the Turk overwhelmed both of them together, as he has already come very near doing to us in a similar case. But if this is not to be, and our unrepentant life makes us unworthy of any grace or counsel or support, we must put up with it and suffer under the devil; but that does not excuse those who could help and do not.

I wish it to be clearly understood, however, by what I have said, that it was not for nothing that I called Emperor Charles the man who ought to go to war against the Turk. As for other kings, princes, and rulers who despise Emperor Charles, or are not his subjects, or are not obedient, I leave them to take their own chances. They shall do nothing by my advice or admonition; what I have written here has been for Emperor Charles and his subjects; the others do not concern me. For I well know the pride of some kings and princes who would be glad if not Emperor Charles, but they, were to be the heroes and masters to win honor against the Turk. I grant them the honor, but if they are beaten in trying to get it, it will be their own fault. Why do they not conduct themselves humbly toward the true head and the regularly appointed ruler. The rebellion among the peasants has been punished, but if the rebellion among the princes and

lords were also to be punished, I believe that there would be very few princes and lords left. God grant that it may not be the Turk who inflicts the punishment! Amen.

Finally, I would have it understood as my kind and faithful advice that, if it comes to the point of war against the Turk, we shall arm and prepare, and not hold the Turk too cheap, acting as we Germans usually do, and coming on the field with twenty or thirty thousand men. And even though a success is granted us and we win a victory, we have no staying-power, but sit down again and carouse until another necessity arises. To be sure, I am not qualified to give instruction on this point, and they themselves know, or ought to know, more about it than I, nevertheless, when I see people acting so childishly, I must think either that the princes and our Germans do not know or believe the strength and power of the Turk, or have no serious purpose to fight against the Turk, but just as the pope has robbed Germany of money under the pretence of the Turkish war and by indulgences,<sup>1</sup> so they, too, following the pope's example, would swindle us out of money.

My advice, therefore, is not to set the armed preparation so low and not to offer our poor Germans to slaughter. If we are not going to make an adequate, honest resistance that will have some staying-power, it were far better not to begin a war, but to give up lands and people to the Turk in time, without useless bloodshed, rather than have him win anyhow in an easy battle and with shameful bloodshed, as happened in Hungary with King Lewis.<sup>2</sup> Fighting against the Turk is not like fighting against the King of France, or the Venetians, or the pope; he is a different kind of warrior; he has people and money in abundance; he beat the Sultan twice in succession,<sup>3</sup> and that took people. Why, dear sir, his people

<sup>1</sup> i.e., Crusading-indulgences.

<sup>2</sup> At the battle of Mohacs, Aug. 29, 1526, Lewis of Hungary commanded an army of not more than 30,000 against a Turkish force of more than 100,000. It is estimated that the Hungarians lost 20,000 men, and the king himself was drowned while retreating. Cf. *Cambridge Modern History*, I, 96 f.

<sup>3</sup> At Aleppo (1516) and Reydaniya (1517). These two victories gave the Ottoman Turks complete supremacy in the Mohammedan world. Cf. *Cambridge Modern History*, I, 90 f.

are under arms all the time, so that he can quickly bring together three or four hundred thousand men; if we were to cut off a hundred thousand, he would soon be back again with as many men as before. He has staying-power.

There is, therefore, nothing at all in trying to meet him with fifty or sixty thousand men unless we have an equal or a greater number in reserve. Only count up his lands, dear sir. He has Greece, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, etc., that is, he has so many lands that if Spain, France, England, Germany, Italy, Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, and Denmark were all counted together, they would not equal the land he has. Besides, he is master of all of them and commands effective and ready obedience. And, as has been said, they are constantly under arms and are exercised in warfare, so that he has staying-power, and can deliver two, three, four battles, one after another, as he showed against the Sultan. This Gog and Magog is a different kind of majesty than our kings and princes.

I say this because I fear that my Germans do not know it or believe it, and think, perhaps, that they are strong enough by themselves, and take the Turk for such a lord as the king of France, whom they would easily withstand. But I shall be without blame, and shall not have laden my tongue and pen with blood, if a king measures himself with the Turk all alone, for it is tempting God when any one sets out with a smaller force against a stronger king, as Christ also shows in the Gospel of Luke, especially since our princes are not the kind of people for whom a divine miracle is to be expected. The king of Bohemia<sup>1</sup> is now a mighty prince, but God forbid that he match himself all alone against the Turk! Let him have Emperor Charles as his captain and all the emperor's power behind him. But then, if everyone will not believe this, let him learn by his own experience! I know what kind of might the Turk's might is, unless the historians and geographers lie, and daily experience, too; they do not, that I know.

Luke  
14:31

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<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand of Austria was elected king of Bohemia in 1526.

I do not say this in order to scare off the kings from war against the Turk, but as an admonition to make wise and serious preparation, and not to go at this matter in so childish and sleepy a way, for I would like, if possible, to prevent useless bloodshed and lost wars. It would be serious preparation, if our princes were to wind their own affairs in a ball and put their heads and hearts, hands and feet, together, and make one body out of the great crowd from which one could make another army, if one battle were lost, and not, as heretofore, let single kings and princes set upon him—yesterday the king of Hungary, tomorrow the king of Bohemia, day after tomorrow the king of Poland—until the Turk devours them one after another and nothing is accomplished by it, except that our people are betrayed and slaughtered and blood is shed needlessly.

For if our kings and princes were to agree, and stand by one another and help one another, and the Christian man<sup>1</sup> were to pray for them, I should be undismayed and of good hope; the Turk would leave his raging and find in Emperor Charles a man who was his equal. Failing that, if things are to go as they now go, and no one is in agreement with another or loyal to another, and everyone wants to be his own man and takes the field with a beggarly array, I must let it go at that. Of course I will gladly help pray, but it will be a weak prayer, for I can have little faith that it will be heard, because of the childish, presumptuous, and short-sighted way in which such great enterprises are undertaken, knowing that it is tempting God and that He can have no pleasure in it.

What do our dear lords do? They take it for a mere jest. It is a fact that the Turk is at our throat, and even if he does not will to march against us this year, yet he is there, armed and ready any hour to attack us, when he will, and yet our princes discuss, meanwhile, how they can harass Luther and the Gospel. It is the Turk! Against it force must be used! It must be put out! That is what they are doing right now at

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<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 101, 110.

Speyer,<sup>1</sup> making the greatest ado about the eating of meat and fish, and foolishness like that. God give you honor,<sup>2</sup> you faithless heads of your poor people! What devil bids you occupy yourselves so violently with spiritual things, which are not committed to you, and be so lax and slothful in dealing with things that God has committed to you and that concern you and your poor people, now in the greatest and most pressing need, and thus be only hindering all those whose intentions are good and who would gladly do their part? Yes, go on singing and hearing the Mass of the Holy Spirit! He has great pleasure in it and will be very gracious to you disobedient, refractory fellows, because you let those things alone that he has committed to you, and work at what he has forbidden you! Yes, the Evil Spirit may hear you!

With this I have cleared my conscience. This book shall be my witness concerning the measure and the manner in which I advise war against the Turk. If any will proceed otherwise, let him proceed, win or lose. I shall not enjoy his victory and not pay for his defeat, but shall be innocent of all the blood that will be shed in vain. I know that this book will not make the Turk a gracious lord to me, if it comes before him; nevertheless, I have wished to tell my Germans the truth, so far as I know it, and give faithful counsel and service to the grateful and the ungrateful alike. If it helps, it helps; if it helps not, then may our dear Lord Jesus Christ help, and come down from heaven with the Last Judgment, and smite both Turk and pope to the earth, together with all tyrants and all the godless, and deliver us from all sins and from all evil. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> The Diet of Speyer was in session when this work was published.

<sup>2</sup> The implication is "For I cannot."





ON THE COUNCILS AND THE CHURCHES  
(Von den Konziliis und Kirchen)

1539



## INTRODUCTION

The work *On the Councils and the Churches* is intimately related to the *Smalcald Articles*. Both of these writings originated as a result of the proposal to hold a general council of the Church to settle the questions that Protestantism had raised.

As early as 1520, Luther had urged the assembly of a general council for the reformation of the Church and had declared that if the pope were unwilling to call such a council, the secular authorities should do so. His *Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*<sup>1</sup> is an argument for the calling of a council and a suggested program for its action. In 1524 the project was taken up by the German diet, then meeting at Nuremberg. It demanded that the pope call "a general, free, and universal council of Christendom," to be held as quickly as possible "at a suitable place in Germany."<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the council was to settle the difficulties arising out of the Lutheran movement and, at the same time, to remove the abuses complained of in the *Gravamina of the German Nation*, presented at Worms and reiterated at Nuremberg. From that time forward the plan was never entirely dropped. It appears in the proceedings of one diet after another. It was espoused by the emperor and pressed by him as a necessary means for restoring peace within the Church and remedying the evils that were apparent in the Church's life.

The proposal was not kindly received at Rome. The memory of the reform-councils of the fifteenth century and of what they had done to the papacy was too fresh in men's minds. Clement VII (1523-34) opposed it with all the devious arts of Medicean diplomacy and during his lifetime, nothing was done toward the assembling of a council. His successor, Paul III (1534-49), was unable to resist the emperor's demand, which was becoming more insistent. At the time of his accession, he publicly declared his intention to call a council. It did not actually assemble until 1545, at Trent, but for ten years before that, talk of the council was in the air and desultory preparations were being made for it.

The first call for the council was issued in June, 1536. It was appointed to meet in Mantua in May, 1537. At the same time, the pope appointed a commission of cardinals to report on conditions in the Roman Church and propose measures of reform.<sup>3</sup>

This action by the pope compelled Luther and his associates to define their position toward the council. As late as 1530, in the Preface to the Augsburg Confession,<sup>4</sup> they had declared their willing-

<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Vol. II, pp. 61 ff.

<sup>2</sup> WREDE, *Deutsche Reichstagsakten*, II, 661ff.; KIDD, *Documents of the Continental Reformation*, No. 69.

<sup>3</sup> The report of the commission (*Consilium de emendanda ecclesia*) was published in 1538. The text is found most conveniently in KIDD, *op. cit.*, pp. 307 ff. Luther republished it, in German translation, with introduction and notes (Weimar Ed., I, 288 ff.)

<sup>4</sup> H. E. JACOBS, *Book of Concord*, pp. 35 f.

ness to "make appearance and defend their cause" before such a council, and the Peace of Nuremberg, in 1532, between the imperial authorities and the Smalcald League, had been arranged to run until a council should be held.<sup>1</sup> As the situation was developing, however, it was becoming more and more apparent that in such a council the Protestant cause would not have a real hearing, and that the kind of reformation which Luther and his followers desired would not be accomplished by it.

More than a year before the call for the council went out, Paul III had begun to sound out the German Protestants. In February, 1535, he had commissioned Paul Vergerius,<sup>2</sup> papal nuncio to Germany, to seek assurance of their participation. His replies were unsatisfactory and in December the Smalcald League, representing the Lutheran princes and cities, laid down four conditions for their entrance into the council. It must be a free council, not a papal council; the Protestants must be invited to it as full participants, not as heretics; its decisions must be based on the authority of the Scriptures, not of the pope; it must be held in Germany, if at all possible. These conditions were entirely unacceptable at Rome.

It was in these circumstances that the Smalcald Articles<sup>3</sup> were prepared. Luther was their author, but they present the view of Christian truth and of the state of the Church which his party held when the council was imminent. They were composed in December, 1536, and signed by Jonas, Cruciger, Bugenhagen, Amsdorf, Melancthon, John Agricola, and Spalatin. They were never actually adopted by the Smalcald League, but were published by Luther in 1538.

Meanwhile, the project for a council had run into other difficulties, chiefly created by the hostility between Charles V and the King of France. In April, 1537, one month before the council was to have met, the date was postponed until November 1, 1537. Later it was postponed still farther, until May 1, 1538, and the meeting-place was changed from Mantua to Vicenza, but on that date the emperor and the French king were at war and the meeting was impossible. Finally (May 21, 1539), the council was indefinitely postponed.

It was during this time of uncertainty about the holding of the council and about the things that such a council would be likely to do, that the treatise *On the Councils and the Churches* was written. The composition may have been begun as early as September, 1538.<sup>4</sup> It was continued, at intervals, during the following months, and completed in March, 1539.<sup>5</sup> It may have been in print as early as May of that year, but was certainly published before August. It was inevitable that it should have many points of contact with the Smalcald Articles, to which, indeed, it is the best and most authoritative commentary. It is also closely connected with a whole group of minor writings of the same period.

This treatise deserves a place in any edition of Luther's selected works. It stands in this edition as the representative work of the old Luther. In it he appears as the disillusioned reformer. All the

<sup>1</sup> KIDÖ, *op. cit.* p. 303.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. BENRATH in *Realencyk.* xx, 546 ff.

<sup>3</sup> JACOBS, *Book of Concord*, pp. 307-38.

<sup>4</sup> See Weimar Ed., p. 501.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 505.

hopes for a reformation of the Church, such as he had envisioned in 1520, have disappeared. The thing is not going to come to pass. Nevertheless, the fight for a pure Church is not to be given up. The disillusioned reformer is not the discouraged reformer. His courage is as high, his position just as uncompromising, as in the days when he hoped that the Roman church could be reformed. Nevertheless, there is a certain crabbedness and testiness in this writing that is not found in the best of his earlier books and tracts, though in violence of expression it is surpassed by some of his still later works. It is the work of a man who has lived for years with illness as a constant companion.

The work is interesting as showing the extent of Luther's knowledge of the Church's past. It contains repeated references to his sources of knowledge. They are Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, which he used in Rufinus' Latin translation, with that author's supplements; Cassiodorus' *Historia tripartita*, which consisted of translated excerpts from the histories of Theodoret, Socrates, and Sozomen; and the Canon Law. To these were added the then newly published, two-volume work of Peter Crabbe, issued in 1538 under the title *Concilia omnia*. It was the most comprehensive collection of material bearing upon the councils to which he had access, and he quotes it frequently. He also cites, though with much criticism, Platina's *Lives of the Popes* (*Historia de vitis pontificum*, written between 1471 and 1481).

The work falls into three parts. Part I argues the thesis that the Church cannot be reformed according to the councils and the fathers. Part II discusses the functions of councils, what they can and what they cannot do. The discussion takes a broad scope. Luther takes up the first four ecumenical councils,—Nicæa (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451),—and the Council of Jerusalem in apostolic days. He examines the records of their proceedings with a view to determining what they actually did, and what of their acts had purely temporary and what had permanent significance. He concludes that their powers are limited to defending the faith of the Church against new errors, and that they have no authority to set up new articles of faith. Incidentally he discusses the heresies that caused the holding of the councils, and runs occasionally into long digressions on matters indirectly connected with the main issues. Apart from the revelation of his historical knowledge and the keenness of his historical criticism, this section has deep interest as an exposition of Luther's own Christology.

Part III deals with the question, "What is the Church and what are the marks by which it is known?" This was not a new subject for Luther. He had discussed it as early as 1519, and his answer to the question is substantially the same as that which he had given twenty years before, in his debate with John Eck at Leipzig and in his tract, *The Papacy at Rome*.<sup>1</sup> Here, however, Luther treats the "marks" of the Church in a broader way than in any of his other writings. Instead of the three marks usually named—the preached Word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Sup-

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<sup>1</sup> In this edition, Vol. I, pp. 337 ff.

per—he enumerates seven, adding the public forgiveness of sins (“the office of the keys”), the office of the ministry, public worship and persecution. It is this third part of the work that has the greatest permanent significance.

The text of the treatise is found in Weimar Ed., L, 509-653; Erlangen Ed.<sup>1</sup> XXV, 219-338; Erlangen Ed.,<sup>2</sup> XXV, 278-448; Berlin Ed., III, 1-172; St. Louis Ed., XVI, 1247 ff. The translation is from the text of Weimar Ed.

Literature. The most valuable commentaries on this treatise are the Introduction to it and to the Smalcald Articles in Weimar Ed. L, 160 ff, 488ff. KÖSTLIN-KAWERAU, Luther, II, 404ff and KÖSTLIN, Luther's Theology (English translation by HAY). A summary of the argument in MACKINNON, Luther, IV, (1930), 132ff.

On special points, SCHAEFER, L. als Kirchenhistoriker, is invaluable.

CHARLES M. JACOBS

MOUNT AIRY  
PHILADELPHIA

## THE COUNCILS AND THE CHURCH

1539

I have often joined in the laughter when some one offered the dogs a bit of bread on the point of a knife and when they snapped at it, rapped them on the muzzle with the handle, so that the poor dogs not only lost the bread, but had the pain beside. It was a good joke, but I never thought, at that time, that the devil would have that kind of a joke on us men and take us for such poor dogs, until I found out how the most holy father, the pope, plays this same kind of a dog's joke on Christendom in his bulls and books and daily practices; but, Lord God, with what loss to men's souls and what mockery of the divine Majesty! That is what he is doing now with the council.<sup>1</sup> The whole world has cried for and waited for it; the good emperor and the whole empire have been working for it for about twenty years;<sup>2</sup> and the pope has always held out false hopes, and held off, and constantly offered it to the emperor, like a bit of bread to a dog, until he saw his time; then he raps him on the muzzle, and mocks him, as though the emperor were his fool and jumping-jack.<sup>3</sup>

The  
Proposed  
Council  
a Trick

For he now issues the third call for the council<sup>4</sup> but before doing it, he sends his apostles into all lands and swears kings and princes to hold fast the pope's doctrine. The bishops and their clergy are in agreement with this; they will yield nothing at all and will allow nothing to be reformed. Thus the council is closed before it begins; we are to have no reforms, but everything is to keep on as it has been up to this time. Is not that a splendid council? It has not yet

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Luther had first demanded a Council, before which his case could be heard, in 1518. Since 1523 the emperor and the diets had been urging it. See Introduction.

<sup>3</sup> Gauckelmenlin, a children's-toy.

<sup>4</sup> The Council had been called to meet in Mantua, May 23, 1537, then postponed until November 1st, and then called to meet at Vicenza, May 1, 1538.

met, but it has already done what it was to do, if it were to begin. That is rapping the emperor on the muzzle; nay, it is overtaking the Holy Ghost and far outstripping Him. I have feared, however,—and have often written it and said it,—that they would not and could not hold a council unless they first captured the emperor, the kings, and the princes, and had them in their own hands, so that they might be altogether free to make what decrees they please, in order to strengthen their tyranny and oppress Christendom with far heavier burdens than it has ever had to bear before.

In God's name, if you lords,—emperor, kings, princes,—are so fond of having such worthless, damnable people trample on your faces and rap you on the muzzle, then we have to let it be done, and remember that they used to do still worse things, when they deposed kings and emperors, cursed them, drove them out, betrayed and slew them, and played the devil's will with them. History shows this; and they think to do the same thing still. Nevertheless, Christ will know how to find His Christendom and maintain it even against the gates of hell, though emperor and kings neither can nor will do anything toward it. He can spare their help more easily than they can spare His help. What did He have to do before emperors and kings were born? And what would He have to do now, if there were no emperors and kings, even though a world full of devils raged against Him? He is not unused to sour food, and He can cook food that is sourer still; woe to them that must eat it!

But we poor, weak Christians, whom these saints call heretics, ought to be glad and happy. We ought joyfully to praise and thank God, the Father of all mercy, that He takes our part so heartily, and smites our murderers and blood-dogs with such Egyptian blindness and Jewish craziness that they propose to yield on no point, however small, and prefer to let Christendom be destroyed rather than allow the smallest of the idolatries (of which they are full) to be reformed. This is their boast; and they fulfill it, too. I say, we should be glad; for this way they make our case better than we had ever asked, and their own case worse than they now think.



They know and confess that, on many points, they are wrong, and have the Scriptures and God against them besides; and yet they would force their way through<sup>1</sup> against God, and knowingly defend wrong as right. In this confidence, a poor Christian ought to go to the Sacrament, even without confession, and risk a hundred necks, if he had them, when he sees so plainly that God reigns on our side, and the devil on theirs.

We have now seen the final conclusion of the future Council at Vicenza<sup>2</sup> and the strict verdict of the last council, (or that which must be regarded as such). It is to the effect that all the world must despair of a reformation of the Church. The matter cannot be given a hearing, but they would rather (as they boast) allow Christendom to be destroyed; in other words, they would rather have the devil himself as god and lord, than have Christ and lay aside even a little of their idolatry. Not satisfied with that, they would compel us poor Christians, with the sword, to join knowingly in their worship of the devil and blasphemy of Christ. Such a defiance no history records and no age has known. Other tyrants have the poor honor of crucifying the Lord of Majesty unknowingly, as do the Turks, heathen, and Jews; but here are men who under Christ's name, and as Christians, nay, as the highest of Christians, puff themselves up and arm themselves against Christ, and say,—“We know that Christ's words and deeds are against us; nevertheless, we will not endure His Word or yield to it, but He must yield to us and endure our idolatry; and yet we will be Christians, and be known as such.”

Thus the pope, with his followers, refuses to hold a council and will neither reform the Church nor contribute advice or assistance to a reformation, but would defend his tyranny by force, and let the Church be destroyed. Therefore we, whom the pope has so sadly deserted, can do nothing else than go elsewhere for advice and help, and begin by seeking and praying a reformation from our Lord Christ. For because of these abandoned tyrants, who compel us to despair

The  
Council  
Will Not  
Reform  
the  
Church

<sup>1</sup>Mit dem kopff hindurch.

<sup>2</sup>See Introduction.

of a council and a reformation, we must not despair of Christ, or leave the Church without advice or help; but we must do what we can, and let them go to the devil, as they desire.

By this they loudly testify against themselves that they are true antichrists and *autocatacrites*<sup>1</sup> who condemn themselves and obstinately desire to be condemned. Thus they exclude themselves from the Church, and openly proclaim that they are, and will continue to be, the Church's worst enemies. For he who says that he would rather that the Church should be destroyed than that he should let himself be improved, or should yield on any point, confesses thereby that he is not only no Christian and does not want to be in the Church (which he would allow to be destroyed, in order that he might remain, and not be destroyed with the Church), but also that he will do what he can for the destruction of the Church. They offer terrible proof of this, not only in such words as these, but also in their deeds, letting so many hundred parishes go to wrack, and churches go to ruin, without shepherds, sermons, and sacraments.

In ancient days the bishops and, indeed, any Christian (as today), let themselves be tortured, and went to death with thankfulness and joy for their dear Church, and Christ went to death for His Church, in order that it might continue and be preserved. But the pope and his followers now declare that the Church must go to death for them, so that they may continue in their tyranny, idolatry, knavery, and all rascality. What think you of these fellows? They would remain; the Church shall be destroyed. What are we going to do about it? But if the Church is to be destroyed, then Christ must first be destroyed; for it is built on Him, as on a rock, against the gates of hell. And if Christ is to be destroyed, God Himself must first be destroyed; for it is He who laid this rock and foundation. Now who could guess that these lords had such great power that the Church and Christ and God Himself must so easily go down before their threats? They must be far, far mightier than the gates of hell and all

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., Self-condemned men.

the devils, for the Church has remained, and must remain, in spite of them.

They cry out, I say, that they will not be the Church, or in the Church, but will be the Church's worst enemies and help destroy it. Nevertheless they have plagued us and nagged us with the word, "Church, Church." They have shouted and spit it out, without measure and without end, that they are to be considered the Church, and they have made us out heretics and cursed us and slain us, because we would not listen to them as though they were the Church. Now, I verily think, we are honorably and mightily absolved, and that they will not and cannot call us heretics any more, since they do not want to be lauded as the Church, but, as enemies of the Church, want it to go to destruction, and even to help suppress it. For to be the Church and, at the same time, to let the Church be destroyed rather than be destroyed themselves, or have a hair's-breadth of themselves destroyed, —those two things do not fit. That settles it—*Ex ore tuo te judico, serve nequam.*<sup>1</sup>

Luke  
19:22

If the Last Day were not close at hand it would be small wonder if heaven and earth were to fall at such blasphemy. The fact that God can tolerate such things as this is a sign that the Day is not far off. And yet they laugh at that, unmindful that they have made God out to be blind, crazy, mad, and foolish, and they think that their doings are wise and manly. I, too, would be as care-free as they are, if I regarded only their raging; but the wrath of God, which is shown upon them, terrifies me sorely, and it is high time that we all wept and prayed earnestly, as Christ did over Jerusalem, when He bade the women weep not for Him, but for themselves and their children. For they do not believe that the time of their visitation is near, and they will not believe it, even though they see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, touch it, and feel it.

Luke  
23:28

Now how are we to attack this thing? The pope will neither give us a true council nor permit a reformation, but he and his will let the Church be destroyed. Thus he has

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<sup>1</sup> "Out of thine own mouth I judge thee, wicked servant."

turned himself out of the Church so that he may remain, and not be destroyed in the Church or with it. He is out; he has bidden the Church good-bye. How, I say, are we to attack this thing? How are we to proceed, since we must do it without the pope? For we are the Church, or in the Church, which the papists would let go to destruction in order that they may remain. But we, too, would like to remain and do not intend to go down so miserably, with our Lord Christ and His Father, the God of us all, before the defiance of the papists. Yet we feel that there is need for a council or reformation in the Church, because we see such gross abuses that, even if we were oxen and asses, and not men or Christians, and could not observe these things with eyes or ears, we must, nevertheless, feel them with paws and claws, and trip over them. Suppose that we, the transitory Church, were ourselves to hold a council<sup>1</sup> against the abiding lords, without the pope and without their consent, and to undertake a reformation which the abiding junkers would consider very transitory, but which they would have to put up with!

But we shall now get down to the matter, since we have lost our most holy head, the pope, and will have to take such counsel with ourselves as our Lord may grant us.

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<sup>1</sup> John Frederick of Saxony had suggested this. Cf. Weimar Ed., L, 514, n. 2.

## PART I

The Church cannot be reformed in accordance with the Fathers and the Councils.

Some years ago many of the papists occupied themselves with the councils and the fathers and at last brought all the councils together in one book.<sup>1</sup> This work gave me no small pleasure, because I had not previously seen the councils side by side. And there are now among them, I believe, some good, pious people who would like to see the Church reformed according to the standard of these councils and fathers. They are moved to this by the fact that the present state of the Church, under the papacy, disagrees shamefully with the ways of the councils and fathers. In this case, however, their good intentions are quite in vain; for, beyond doubt, it is their idea that the pope and his people would, or would have to, include themselves in such a reformation. But that is a vain idea, for there stands the pope, with his abiding lords,<sup>2</sup> and defies them, as he defies us, saying that they would rather let the Church perish than yield a single point; i.e., they would rather let councils and fathers perish than yield to them in anything. For if the councils and fathers were to be followed, God help us! what would become of the pope and the present bishops? In truth, they would have to become the perishable Church, instead of being abiding lords.

The  
Pope  
Will Not  
be Re-  
formed

I will say nothing about the ancient days, which we may call the thousand or fourteen hundred years after the birth of Christ. It is not more than a hundred years since the pope began the holy practice of giving one priest two livings,<sup>3</sup> such as canonries or parishes. The theologians at Paris and

<sup>1</sup> There is some doubt concerning the edition to which Luther refers. It was probably the two volume collection of Peter Crabbe, published at Cologne in 1538, though it may have been the earlier work of Jacob Merlin. Cf. Weimar Ed. L, 502, 514 n., and SCHAEFER, L. als Kirchenhistoriker, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 136.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 93 ff.

their comrades wrote many terrible things about this and complained of it. I am not yet sixty years old, and yet I know that within my memory the custom has grown up that a bishop should have more than one endowment. Meanwhile, however, the pope has devoured everything, made a robbery of the annates and everything else, and portions out the bishoprics by threes, the abbeys and endowed positions by tens.<sup>1</sup> How can he spue all this up again and let his chancelry be torn apart, for the sake of the fathers and councils? Yes, you say, this is an abuse; well, then, take your ancient councils and fathers and reform it all, for things were not like this a hundred years ago or sixty years ago, before you were born.

Now of what use is your reformation according to the fathers and councils? You hear that the pope and the bishops will not endure it; and if they could not endure the condition of the Church fifty years ago, when you and I were children, how would they or could they endure it, if we wanted to reform it by restoring the condition of the Church of six hundred, or a thousand, or fourteen hundred years ago. This proposal is simply impossible, because the pope is in possession, and wants to be unreformed. Therefore we must let both councils and fathers and everything that we can say or think, be useless in these matters; for the pope is above councils, above fathers, above kings, above God, above angels. Let us see you bring him down and make the fathers and councils his masters! If you do that, I will agree with you and stand by you; but so long as it does not happen, what is the use of talking or writing so much about councils or fathers? There is no one who takes the matter up. If the pope, with his imperishable lords, cardinals and bishops, is unwilling to go along into the reformation and be put, with us, under the councils and fathers, then a council is of no use and then no reformation is to be hoped from him; for he dashes it all to the ground and tells us to shut up.

But suppose they ask that we allow ourselves to be re-

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<sup>1</sup> Albrecht of Mainz held two archbishoprics and a bishopric at one and the same time.

formed, with them, according to the councils and fathers, and so help the Church, even though the pope and his people would neither do it nor suffer it! What then? To this I give a double answer. Either they are bitter, malicious, and bad, and do not mean it well; or else they are good-hearted and mean it well, so far as in them lies.

To the former it should be said that they ought first to take themselves by the nose and pull the beam out of their own eye. Let them, with the pope and cardinals or without the pope and cardinals, grow fond of the councils and fathers and hold to them. When that happens, then we, following their holy example, will straightway be there, and will become better than they are themselves. For, God be praised and thanked! we are not such abandoned people that we would let the Church perish rather than yield, even in great matters, so long as they are not against God. On the contrary, so far as our knowledge and ability go, we are ready to perish utterly,<sup>1</sup> rather than that misfortune or injury should befall the Church.

But if they themselves pay no heed to the fathers and councils, and yet would force us under them, that is too raw; and we must say, *Medice cura te ipsum*,<sup>2</sup> and, with Christ, "They lay on people's necks intolerable burdens, which they themselves will not touch with one finger." That does no good, and we have no small reason for refusal, especially since they ascribe such great sanctity to the fathers and the councils. We do not keep them; and neither do they, except in words and on paper, when they show it to us; for we confess, and must confess, that we are right poor, weak Christians, and that in many things.

Luke  
4:23

Matt.  
23:4

For one thing, we have so much to do, day and night, with reading, thinking, writing, teaching, exhorting, encouraging both ourselves and others, that, indeed, no time is left us even to think whether there ever were councils or fathers, to say nothing of concerning ourselves with such high matters as tonsures, chasubles, long robes, etc., and their high

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<sup>1</sup>Bis das weder haut noch har da sei.

<sup>2</sup>"Physician, heal thyself."

sanctity. If they have risen so high and become so altogether angelic and so rich in faith, that the devil has to let them alone, and can start no errors among them and terrify no weak consciences; we weak Christians have not attained to that state, and we fear that we never shall attain to it on earth. Therefore they really ought to be gracious and merciful, and not condemn us because we cannot yet equal them in holiness. For if we were to leave the work that we have in matters of faith and, weak as we are, to emulate their strong holiness in dress and foods, we might give up our weak holiness and not attain their high, strong holiness, and so sit down between two chairs.

But if they will not be gracious and merciful to us, we must let them be angels and dance in Paradise among the flowers, as men who have long since abolished faith and, in their heavenly holiness, have no temptation from devil, flesh, or world. But we must toil and sweat in slime and mud; poor fibelists<sup>1</sup> and beginners in faith that we are, we cannot be such high doctors and magisters in faith. If we had as much faith as they think that they have, we could bear tonsures, chasubles, councils and fathers more easily than they do; but since they do not bear them at all, they bear them easily (for to bear nothing is to have no heavy burden), and boast, the while, that we are not willing to bear them.

Likewise we poor Christians have enough to do to keep God's commandments, so much, indeed, that we cannot give attention to the other high works, which they boast of as spiritual, conciliar, and patristic. For we drive and practice both ourselves and our followers, with the greatest diligence, to love God above all things, and our neighbor as ourselves, to be humble and patient, merciful and gentle, chaste and sober, not covetous or envious, and to keep the rest of God's commandments. We should be glad if there were among our people no pride, avarice, usury, envy, over-drinking, over-eating, adultery, or wantonness; but we succeed so poorly and miserably that we can bring only a few of them to these good works; the great mass remains what it is and

Reform  
by Keep-  
ing the  
Com-  
mand-  
ments

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<sup>1</sup> Pupils who are still learning the alphabet.



grows worse every day. Now figure it out yourself, when we are so weak in the doing of these necessary works, commanded by God, how can we leave them and give ourselves to the high, strong, unnecessary works of which they tell us? If we had performed the divine, little, despicable, or as they contemptuously call them, "civil" works, then, God willing! we would begin to do their spiritual, churchly works about meat-eating, dress, holy days, etc.

But they have an easy task,<sup>1</sup> because they fulfil all God's commandments, love God above all things and have no covetousness or usury, no adulterers or fornicators, no drinkers or drunkards among them, but they do all these little, good, divine works so easily that time actually hangs heavy on their hands.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it is only right that, over and above these "civil" works of ours, they should undertake to do stronger or higher works, in obedience to the Church or the fathers, since they are far too strong to practice these little good works with us; they have taken a long leap beyond them and have got far ahead of us. Nevertheless, in their high and strong mercy, and according to the doctrine of St. Paul, they ought to have sympathy with us weak, poor Christians, and not condemn us or make fun of us because we are learning so childishly to toddle along the benches, nay, to creep in the mire, and cannot skip and dance, on such light feet and legs, over and outside of God's commandments, as they do, the strong heroes and giants, who can attack the works that are higher and greater than loving God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself; though St. Paul calls this "the fulfilling of the law" in Romans xiii, and so does Christ, in Matthew v.

Rom.  
13:10

Matt.  
5:19

If they will not have sympathy with us, however, we ask at least a little time until we have completed God's commandments and the little children's works; then we will gladly fall to upon their high, spiritual, knightly, manly works. For what is the use of trying to compel a child to run and work like a strong man? Nothing will come of it; the child cannot. So we poor, weak Christians, who, in God's command-

<sup>1</sup>Sie haben gut thun. Cf. Weimar Ed., L. 518, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Dass sie schlechtweg müssig gehen.

ments and His little good works, toddle along the benches and sometimes scarcely creep on all fours, nay, even pull ourselves along on the ground, so that Christ must dandle us, as a mother or a maid dandles a child,—we simply cannot keep pace with their strong, manly running and doing; and God forbid that we should! Therefore we shall keep the “churchly and conciliar holiness” (as they call it) until we have nothing more to do in God’s commandments and good works, and not permit this reformation which we cannot accomplish. Let that be sufficient answer to the first kind of people, those who demand this reformation of us with evil intent.

The  
Councils  
and  
Fathers  
Cannot  
Help Us

The second kind<sup>1</sup> are those who hope, though vainly, that such a fine reformation as they imagine might still be accomplished by means of the fathers and councils, even though the pope were unwilling or wanted to hinder it. These I answer kindly that I regard it an impossible undertaking and do not know at all how it can be attacked. For I, too, have read the fathers, even before I set myself so stiffly against the pope; and I read them more diligently than they who now quote them so defiantly and proudly against me; for I know that none of them has attempted, as I have, to lecture in the schools upon a book of Holy Scripture and use the writings of the fathers in doing so. Let them take up one book of Holy Scripture and seek their glosses<sup>2</sup> in the fathers, and they will have the same experience that I had, when I took up Hebrews with St. Chrysostom’s glosses, Titus and Galatians with the help of St. Jerome’s, Genesis with the help of St. Ambrose’s and Augustine’s, the Psalter with all the writers that were to be had, and so on.<sup>3</sup> I have read more than they think and driven through all the books, and they are too presumptuous when they imagine that I have not read the fathers, and would hold up to me as something precious the very thing that, twenty years ago, I had to think lightly of so that I might read the Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., interpretations.

<sup>3</sup> On Luther’s use of the fathers in his exegetical works, see SCHAEFER, L. als Kirchenhistoriker, 180 ff.

St. Bernard claims that he learned his wisdom from the trees, the oaks and pines, which were his *doctores*, i.e., he got his ideas under the trees, out of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> He says, too, that he regards the holy fathers highly, but does not heed everything that they have spoken. He states his reason in this parable,—he would rather drink from the spring than from the rill. So all men who can drink out of the spring forget the rill, except as they use the rill to bring them to the spring; thus the Scriptures must remain master and judge. Or, if we follow the rills too much, they lead us too far from the spring, and lose both taste and virtue, until at last they flow into the salt sea, and are lost. That is what has happened under the papacy.

Enough of that! We would show cause why this undertaking is impossible. In the first place, it is plain that the councils are not only unequal, but even contradictory, and the same is true of the fathers. If we were to try to harmonize them, there would be greater disagreement and disputing than there now is, and we should never get out of it any more. For since they are unlike and often contradictory, our first undertaking would be to see how we could cull out the best and let the rest go. Then the trouble would start! One would say, "If we are going to keep them, we must keep all or nothing." Another would say, "You are culling out what you like, and leaving what you do not like." Who will be the umpire?

Look at the *Decretum*,<sup>2</sup> in which Gratian had this very purpose, so that the book was even called *Concordantia discordantium*: i.e., he wanted to compare the unlike utterances of the fathers and councils, harmonize the contradictory ones and cull out the best. He succeeded like a crab walks;<sup>3</sup> often let the best go and kept the worst, and neither compared nor harmonized them. The jurists themselves say it stinks of ambition and avarice, and a canonist is nothing but a jackass. How much more would that be

<sup>1</sup> Luther had made use of this same reference in a similar connection as early as 1519. Cf. ENDERS, i. 439.

<sup>2</sup> The *Decretum* of Gratian, which forms the first part of the Canon Law. Cf. Vol. II, p. 67, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., Backwards.

the case with us if we actually got to the point of trying to make the utterances and opinions of all the fathers and councils agree together! It would be pains and labor lost and bad would be made worse, and I shall not involve myself in such a dispute; for I know that there would be no end to it and we would have, at last, only an uncertain case, at the cost of vain and lost labor and time. They are too green,<sup>1</sup> the young paper-smearers, and far too inexperienced. They think that what they read and imagine must be so and all the world must worship it, though they cannot say the A B C of Scripture and are inexpert even in the fathers and councils. They shout and sputter, and do not know what they are saying and writing.

I shall say no more of Gratian. St. Augustine writes to Januarius and complains<sup>2</sup> that even in his time, that is, three hundred years after Christ (for in this year 1539 he has been dead for eleven hundred and two years),<sup>3</sup> the Church was already greatly burdened with statements of bishops, on one side and another, so that the condition of the Jews was more tolerable and endurable; and he sets down these clear, plain words, *Innumerabilibus servilibus oneribus premunt ecclesiam*, "They oppress the Church with innumerable burdens," while the Jews are burdened only by God, not by men. He also says, in the same place, that it was Christ's will to impose upon the Church only a few, easy ceremonies, viz., baptism and the sacrament of the altar, and speaks of no more than these two, as everyone can read. The books are to be had and no one can accuse me of inventing this.

But he makes a mighty rent in this, and says, in the same place, *Hoc genus habet liberas observationes*, i.e., "No one is bound to keep all of these, but may omit them without sin." If St. Augustine is not here a heretic, then I shall never become a heretic. He throws the opinions of so many bishops and so many churches all on a heap in the fire and recommends only baptism and the Sac-

<sup>1</sup>*Zu geel umb den Schnabel.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ad inquisitiones Januarii*, in Migne, xxxiii, 221.

<sup>3</sup>Luther was seven years out of the way. Augustine died in 430.

rament, believing that Christ did not will to impose any further burden on the Church, if, indeed, that can be called a burden which is all comfort and grace; as He says, "My burden is light and my load is pleasant," i.e., "My burden is peace and my load is pleasure."

Matt.  
11:30

Nevertheless, the fine, wise man does this honor to the great, so-called universal,<sup>1</sup> or chief, councils. He makes a distinction between them and the others, and the statements of the bishops, and says that they are to be highly thought of, saying, in the same place, that the ordinances of these great chief councils ought rightly be kept, and that much depends on them and that they have, to use his own words, *saluberrimam auctoritatem*, i.e., it is highly profitable to have respect for them. But he never saw one of these great councils, nor was he ever in one of them, otherwise he would, perhaps, have written differently, or more, about them. For in all the books there are not more than four of these chief councils that are famous or well-known, and so the Roman bishops<sup>2</sup> compare them to the four Gospels, as they cry in their decretals.

The  
Ecumen-  
ical  
Councils

The first was the Nicene Council, held at Nicæa, in Asia, in the fifteenth year of Constantine the Great, almost thirty-five years before Augustine's birth.<sup>3</sup> The second was at Constantinople in the third year of the Emperors Gratian and Theodosius the Great,<sup>4</sup> who ruled jointly. At that time Augustine was still a heathen, and not a Christian, a man about twenty-six years old, so that he could not take an interest in all the matters. The third, at Ephesus, he did not live to see;<sup>5</sup> still less the fourth, at Chalcedon.<sup>6</sup> All this comes from the histories and the reckoning of the years; it is certain.

I must say this because of the saying of St. Augustine, that the great chief councils are to be regarded, because much depends on them, in order that his opinion may be

<sup>1</sup> Or ecumenical.

<sup>2</sup> In the Canon Law (Decret. Grat. 1, dist. 15, c. 2), quoted from Gregory I, 2 p. I, 24.

<sup>3</sup> The Council of Nicæa was held in 325; Augustine was born in 354.

<sup>4</sup> A. D. 381.

<sup>5</sup> The Council of Ephesus was held in 431, the year after Augustine's death.

<sup>6</sup> The Council of Chalcedon was in 451.

rightly understood. He was speaking of only two councils, Nicæa and Constantinople, which he had not seen, but afterwards learned about from writings; and at their time no bishop was over any other. The bishops, neither the bishop of Rome nor any other, could never have brought these councils into existence, if the emperors had not called them together. And so I judge, in my folly, that the great, or universal, councils are so called because the bishops were called together out of all lands by the monarch, the great, chief, or universal, ruler.

Called  
by the  
Em-  
perors

For no matter how wild it makes all the papists, history testifies that, if the Emperor Constantine had not called the first Council at Nicæa, Pope Sylvester<sup>1</sup> would have had to leave it uncalled. And what would the poor bishop of Rome have done, for the bishops in Asia and Greece were not subject to him? If he could have done it, without the power of the Emperor Constantine, he would have put it, not in Asia, far across the sea, where no one cared anything about his authority (as he well knew by experience), but in Italy, at Rome, or somewhere nearby, and he would have compelled the emperor to come thither. I have the same to say of the other three councils, named above. If the emperors Gratian, Theodosius,<sup>2</sup> Theodosius II,<sup>3</sup> and Marcian<sup>4</sup> had not assembled those three great councils, they would never have been held for the sake of the bishop of Rome or the other bishops; for the bishops in other lands cared as much about the Roman bishop, as the bishops of Mainz, Trier and Cologne,<sup>5</sup> now care about the authority of one another; indeed they cared much less.

Yet one sees in the histories that the Roman bishops, even before that time, were always seeking<sup>6</sup> after lordship over the other bishops, but could not get it because of the mon-

<sup>1</sup> Sylvester (314-337) was pope at the time of the Council.

<sup>2</sup> Gratian (375-83) and Theodosius I (379-95) were responsible for the Council of Constantinople.

<sup>3</sup> Theodosius II was emperor in the East, 408-50.

<sup>4</sup> Marcian was also emperor in the East, 450-58.

<sup>5</sup> The three principal archbishops of Germany.

<sup>6</sup> Sie haben geseuchelt, gekrunckt, gehustet und gekrochtztet nach der Herrschaft. This defies translation. Cf. Weimar Ed. I, 523, notes.

arch. They wrote many letters, now to Africa, now to Asia, and so on, even before the Nicene Council, saying that nothing was to be ordered publicly without the Roman See. But no one paid any attention to it at the time, and the bishops in Asia, Africa, and Egypt acted as though they did not hear it. They gave the people fine words, and they were humble, but they yielded nothing. You will discover this if you read the histories and compare them carefully; but you must pay no attention to their cries and those of their hypocrites, but look the texts and histories in the face or see them as a mirror.

Now when the word "Council" (partly because of the above-mentioned letter of Augustine) was in high honor among Christians throughout the world, and the fine monarchs, or emperors, were gone, the Roman bishops were always considering how they might get possession of the name "Council," so that all Christendom would have to believe what they said, and how, under this fine name, they might secretly become monarchs. This is the truth and it smites their conscience, if they could have a conscience. And that is what actually happened. They accomplished it,<sup>1</sup> so that they have now become Constantine, Gratian, Theodosius, Marcian, and much more than these monarchs and their four great councils. For the pope's councils now are called, *Sic volo, sic jubeo, sit pro ratione voluntas*,<sup>2</sup> not in all the world, to be sure, nor throughout the Church, but in that part of the Roman Empire that Charles the Great had.<sup>3</sup> At last, possessed by all the devils, they shamefully overthrew some of the emperors, trod them under foot, and betrayed them in many ways; and they would still do the same thing, if they could.<sup>4</sup>

Enough, for the present, about what St. Augustine says of the councils! We would also show what he believes about the fathers. He says, in the letter to St. Jerome, which Gra-

Augustine  
and the  
Fathers

<sup>1</sup> *Sie habens ersencht und erhustet*. Another untranslatable expression.

<sup>2</sup> "I will it; I command it; my will is the reason for it." A proverb originating in Juvenal.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., in the lands of Western Europe.

<sup>4</sup> A reference to humiliations put upon the mediæval emperors by the popes.

tian also quotes, in *dist. 9*,<sup>1</sup> "I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant; all others, I so read that, however holy or learned they may be, I do not hold what they teach to be true, unless they prove, from Scripture or reason, that it must be so." Furthermore, in the same section of the *Decretum*<sup>2</sup> is St. Augustine's saying, from the preface to his book *De trinitate*, "Do not follow my writings as Holy Scripture. When you find in Holy Scripture anything that you did not believe before, believe it without doubt; but in my writings, you should hold nothing for certain, concerning which you were before uncertain, unless I have proved that it is certain." Many more sayings of this kind are in other passages of his writings. He says, for example, "As I read the books of others, so will I have mine read." The other sayings I shall pass by for the present.

The papists know very well that there are many of these passages here and there in Augustine and some bits of them have been put in the *Decretum*. Nevertheless, they act against their own consciences, and pass over these sayings, or suppress them, and set the fathers, the councils, nay, even the bishops of Rome, who have commonly been very unlearned men, above everything. St. Augustine must have detected many faults in the fathers who were before him, because he wants to be impartial and have all of them, including himself, subject to Holy Scripture. Otherwise, why should he have needed to guard himself against them by saying, "However holy or learned they may be"? He might have said, "Yes, everything that they write I consider equal to Holy Scripture, because they are so holy and learned," but he says "No." So he also says in another letter to St. Jerome,<sup>3</sup> who was angry because St. Augustine was not satisfied with one point in his commentary on Galatians, "Dear brother (for he was a fine, kindly man), I hope that you would not have your books considered equal to the books of the apostles and prophets."

<sup>1</sup>*Decret. Grat. I, dist. 9, c. 5; the original in Migne, xxxiii, 277. The Latin text in Weimar Ed. L, 524, note b.*

<sup>2</sup>*dist. 9, c. 3; the original in Migne, xlii, 869.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ep. 82; Migne, xxxiii, 227; Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, I, 350.*



I would be ashamed to death, if such a good, fine man were to write such letters to me and ask me not to think my books equal to the books of the apostles and prophets, as St. Augustine writes to St. Jerome. But what we are now concerned with is the fact that St. Augustine observed that the fathers were sometimes human and had not overcome Romans vii;<sup>1</sup> therefore he will not rely on them,—neither on his predecessors, holy and learned fathers though they were, nor on himself, and still less upon his successors, who would be smaller men—but he will have the Scriptures as master and judge. So it has been said above<sup>2</sup> by Bernard that the oaks and pines were his masters, and he would rather drink from the spring than from the rill. He could not have said this, if he had held the books of the fathers equal to Holy Scripture and had found no fault in them; but he would have said, “It is all the same whether I drink from the Scriptures or the fathers.” He does not do that, but lets the rill flow on, and drinks from the spring.

Rom. 7:  
18ff.

What are we to do, then? If we are to bring the Church back to the doctrine and opinion of the fathers, there stands St. Augustine, and confuses us and lets us find no end to our differences of opinion, because he will not have reliance put upon the fathers, bishops, or councils, no matter how holy and learned they may be, nor on himself, but refers us to the Scriptures; otherwise, he says, everything is uncertain, and lost, and vain. But to exclude St. Augustine is in conflict with our purpose, which is to have a Church that will accord with the doctrine of the fathers; for if St. Augustine is thrown out of their number, the others are not worth much, and it is intolerable nonsense not to consider St. Augustine one of the best fathers, since throughout all Christendom he is esteemed the highest of them, and both Church and school have hitherto preserved his writings best of all, as is plain. And yet you compel us to this endless trouble and labor of holding to the councils and fathers, against the Scriptures, and judging ourselves by them! Before that

<sup>1</sup> “The good that I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do, etc.”

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 143.

happens we shall all be dead; the Last Day will come long before that.

What  
Do the  
Councils  
Teach?

However, we shall put aside St. Augustine, Bernard, and those who write such things, and take up the councils and fathers themselves and see whether we should be able to direct our life by them. But in order not to make too long a story of it, we shall take up particularly the first two great councils, which St. Augustine praises; namely, those of Nicæa and Constantinople, although he did not see them. Nay, in order to make our case altogether certain, and in order that we may make no mistakes and have no fears, we shall take up the first council, that of the apostles, held at Jerusalem, of which St. Luke writes in Acts xv. There it is written that the apostles claimed that the Holy Spirit ordered these things through them. *Visum est Spiritui Sancto et nobis*, etc., "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication, from which if ye abstain, ye do well."

The  
Apostolic  
Council

Acts  
15:28

There we hear that the Holy Ghost (as the preachers of councils boast) commands that we are to eat nothing that has been sacrificed to idols, no blood, nothing that has been strangled. Now if we would have a Church according to this council (as would be only right, since it is the highest and the first, and was held by the apostles themselves), we should have to teach and insist that no prince, lord, burgher, or peasant should henceforth eat geese, roe-deer, stag, or pork cooked in blood, and must also avoid carp and fish-jelly; for there is blood in them or, as the cooks say, "color." And especially must the burghers and peasants eat no red sausage, or blood-sausage, for that is not just thin blood, but blood that has been thickened and cooked, a very coarse blood. Likewise we must not eat rabbits or birds for, according to the laws of the chase, they are all strangled,<sup>1</sup> even though they are not cooked in blood, but only fried.

If, then, we are to abstain from blood, according to this

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., Taken in snares.

council, we must let the Jews be our masters, in church and kitchen, for they have a special, big book on the subject of blood-eating,<sup>1</sup> so big that one cannot vault over it with a pole, and they look for blood so closely that they will not eat meat with any Gentile or Christian even though the meat is not strangled, but slaughtered as purely as possible (like the meat of oxen and calves) and the blood washed out with water; they would rather die than do it. God help us! how we Christians would be tormented over this council, in the two matters of eating blood and the meat of strangled animals alone! Let anyone who will start to bring the Church into obedience to this council; I shall follow him very gladly. Otherwise, I want to be excused from listening to this cry of "Councils! Councils! You do not keep the councils and fathers!" Or I will cry back, "You yourselves do not keep councils or fathers, because you treat this highest council and the highest fathers, the apostles themselves, with contempt! Why do you think that I ought or must keep councils and fathers, when you yourselves will not touch them with a finger?" I would say, as I said to the Sabbatarians,<sup>2</sup> that they ought first to keep their Mosaic law, and then we, too, would keep it; but when they themselves do not and cannot keep it, it is laughable when they ask us to keep it.

You say it is not possible to introduce the rules of this council because opposite practices have become too widespread. That is no answer, for we have undertaken to govern ourselves according to the councils, and here it says, "The Holy Ghost has decreed." Against the Holy Ghost the plea that things have gone too far or taken too deep a hold, has no force, and that kind of excuses leaves no conscience sure of what to do. If we would be conciliar, we must keep this council above all others; if not, then we may keep none of the other councils and thus be free from all councils. For in this council there were not simple bishops, as in the others, but the apostles themselves, who were the Holy

<sup>1</sup>Luther is probably referring to the Talmud. Cf. Weimar Ed. L, 527, note a.

<sup>2</sup>Ein Brief D. Mart. Luther. Wider die Sabbather, published in March, 1538. Weimar Ed., L, pp. 312-37.

Ghost's certain and highest fathers. Besides, it is not so impossible to avoid blood and things strangled! What would it be like, if we had to eat corn, herbs, beets, apples, and other fruits of the earth and the trees, as our ancestors did before the Flood, when it was not permitted to eat meat? We should not die of hunger, even if we were to eat neither meat nor fish. How many people, even today, have to live, eating fish or meat very seldom. Thus the plea of impossibility does not help to strengthen our conscience against the Holy Ghost, because without injury to body or soul, we could go back to living, not only without eating blood and things strangled, as Moses teaches, but also without fish and meat, as before the Flood. I am surprised that, with all the many spirits of disorder of these days, the devil has not brought up these beautiful ideas, which have such fine precedents of Scripture on their side.

If we were to say that all this was not only impossible, but had fallen of itself and come into disuse or gone out of use (as I am accustomed to call the canons which are no more in use *canones mortuos*, "dead canons"), this again would not stand the test. I know, to be sure, that the pope and his followers seek this way out, and pretend that the Church has the power to alter this council of the apostles. This is a lie! They cannot produce a single utterance of the Church which contains a commandment to do this or make any changes. Besides, it is not proper for the Church to alter an ordinance of the Holy Ghost, and it never does so.

Matt.  
15:14

They do not see, however, blind leaders that they are, that with that kind of talk they are only preparing a rod for their own hide. If we allow that men have power to alter the ordinance and commandment of the Holy Ghost, we shall straightway tread the pope under foot, with all his breves and bulls, and say, —"If the first decrees of the apostles are not binding, though we are sure that the Holy Ghost established them, as they themselves say, *Visum est*, how much less shall the power and the decrees of the popes be binding, about which we are by no means so certain that the

Holy Ghost was with them as He was with the apostles? We must let the apostles amount to something, too, and even though they were not above the popes, (as the heretic, Dr. Luther, holds), nevertheless, we must give them a seat alongside the popes. And as a proof of this, the popes have often been open and abandoned knaves, and again and again one of them has thrown away the decrees of another. The Holy Ghost cannot contradict Himself thus and the apostles were not such popes or knaves. Therefore there must be something else to say about this; these bad jokes will not work; unless one were to say that the Church was built upon a reed, which the wind blows hither and yon, according to the whim of the pope or of men. For the Church must not sway on a reed, but rest upon the rock and be firmly founded, as Matthew vii and xvi say."

Matt.  
7:26  
16:18

But we were beginning to say that it<sup>1</sup> has fallen of itself, without alteration by the Church, and therefore one need no longer keep it. Nay, dear friend, Male,<sup>2</sup> says the jurist. If one is not to keep a law, or it is to become no law because it is not kept or has fallen, then let us be easy in our minds and keep no more laws. A whore can say that she is doing right because the sixth commandment has fallen and is not in use among adulterers and adulteresses. Nay, we children of Adam, together with the devils, will hold a council against God, and pass this resolution: "Listen, God, all your commandments have fallen and are no longer in use among us men and devils; therefore we ought no longer to keep them, but act against them; you ought to approve of that and not condemn us, since there is no sin, when the law has fallen." So robbers and murderers might also beatify themselves, and say: "We are no longer bound to be obedient to you princes and lords, but are right in fighting you and robbing you, for among us your law has fallen, etc."

Advise us, now, what we are to do. It does not help us that the apostolic council has fallen (which is the truth!) or been altered by the Church (which is a lie!). What harm would be done, if we were to scratch out the word, Holy

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., The decree of the apostolic council.

<sup>2</sup>"Wrong."

Ghost, and let it be the apostles alone who made this decree, without the Holy Ghost? Perhaps that would help the case! If that is laughable, then think up something better! If one does not scratch out "Holy Ghost" from the council, then one of two things must happen,—either both we and the papists should keep this council; or we should be free from it and it need not be kept, and so we poor heretics would be rid of the cry, "Councils, Councils, Councils!" For if this council is not to be kept, then none of the rest is to be kept, as I have said. Otherwise, they should hear once more the cry, *Medice, cura te ipsum*,<sup>1</sup> "Hans take yourself by the nose." Let them who raise this cry first keep it, and we will follow in their footsteps. If not, then their crying and sputtering of this word, "Councils, Councils" is not in earnest, but they are only using it to trample people in the face, to terrify weak consciences treacherously and wickedly, and to destroy simple souls.

I say all this about this council, because it is the first and the highest, so that we may think the matter over before we allow that the Church should live, or be ruled, according to the councils. If this council causes us so much confusion, what will it be like when we take up the others? It is true, I admit, that the word "Council" is easy to say, and a sermon about keeping the councils is easy to preach; but what attitude to take in order to put the councils in force again,—what about that, my dear friend?<sup>2</sup> The pope and his followers are clever; they get off lightly by saying that he is above all councils and may keep what he will and allow others to keep them as far as he will. Yes, if the problem can be solved that way, then let us stop using the word "Council" and stop preaching that the councils shall be kept, and cry, instead, "Pope, pope! The pope's doctrine should be kept!" Thus we all get off easy and are fine Christians, like them! For what good will the council do us, if we cannot and will not keep it, but only boast the name or the letters that compose it?

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<sup>1</sup> "Physician, cure thyself." Cf. above, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Wo nun? wo da? lieber Freund.*

Or (since we are talking about it, and must jest a little in this carnival-time<sup>1</sup>), it seems better still to me, if it is only a matter of the letters C-o-u-n-c-i-l, without deeds or results, that we should make the penmen<sup>2</sup> popes, cardinals, bishops, and preachers. They could write those letters finely, —big, little, black, red, green, yellow, and any way that was wanted. Then the Church would be ruled by the councils and there would be no need to keep what has been ordered by the councils, but the Church would have enough when it had the letters, C-o-u-n-c-i-l, C-o-u-n-c-i-l. But if the penmen do not please us, let us take painters and wood-carvers and printers, to paint and carve and print us beautiful councils, and then the Church is splendidly ruled. Let us make the painters, carvers and printers pope, cardinals and bishops! What would be the use, then, of asking any further how the decrees of the councils are to be kept? Letters and pictures are enough.

But think a little further! Suppose that all men were blind, and could not see these councils when they were written, painted, carved, printed! How, then, could the Church be ruled by the councils? My advice is to take the choristers at Halberstadt and Magdeburg, when they sing the *Quicunque*<sup>3</sup> and let them shout, instead, "Council, Council" until the church and the whole dome shake. We could hear them away across the Elbe, even if we were all blind. Then the Church would be well ruled and these choristers would quickly be made popes, cardinals and bishops, because it is so easy for them to rule the Church, which has become an impossible task for the holy Fathers in Rome.

I shall say more about this council after a while; this is getting too long, for I must not forget the Council of Nicæa, which is the best, and the first, universal council after that of the apostles.

The  
Council  
of  
Nicæa

This council decrees, among other things, that Christians who have fallen are to be received back into penance for a

<sup>1</sup> Fastnacht, an indication of the date when this part of the treatise was written. In 1539, Shrove Tuesday was February 19th.

<sup>2</sup> Die Stuhlschreiber, the professional penmen.

<sup>3</sup> The Athanasian Creed, *Quicunque vult salvus esse.*

Penance  
and  
Purga-  
tory

period of seven years; if they die in the meantime, they are to be free, and are not to be denied the Sacrament.<sup>1</sup> This decree the council-criers themselves do not keep, but act against it and consign dying Christians to purgatory with the remainder of their penance. If the pope were to keep this rule, the devil! what a poor beggar he would become, and all the monasteries along with him, if this mine, ore-pit, and trade—viz., purgatory, masses, pilgrimages, foundations,<sup>2</sup> brotherhoods, indulgences, bulls, etc.—were to come to nothing. The devil protect the pope, with all cardinals, bishops, monks and nuns, so that the Church may not be ruled according to this council! What would become of them? But this decree concerns me, for I have urged it against the pope before now, and can readily imagine how they might turn it about and interpret it against me,<sup>3</sup> and so I shall let it go now. I must deal just now with things that affect both parties, to the praise and honor of the council-criers!

War

The same council decrees that those who give up warfare for the sake of religion, and afterwards go to war again, are to spend five years among the catechumens, and two years after that are to be admitted to the Sacrament.<sup>4</sup> I take the word "religion" to mean, here, the common Christian faith; of that more later. In order not to get off the track and be hindered in my course by such side-questions, I shall not here discuss whether the council was forbidding war or had the power and right to forbid it or condemn it, if the soldier did not otherwise deny the faith of which the former rule speaks. On the contrary, our question is whether this article—viz., that no soldier can be saved or be a Christian,—has hitherto been kept or whether it is to be kept henceforth as a matter of law. For the pope himself, with all his followers, must testify that this article has fallen and cannot possibly be set up again, far less even than

<sup>1</sup>The Canons of Nicæa were preserved in several different forms. For the provisions here cited, see *Nicene & Postnicene Fathers*, Series I, Vol. XIV, pp. 24, 29, Canons XI and XIII. Luther's citation of the canons is not always accurate and seems to rest upon the account of Rufinus. (Cf. Weimar Ed., I, 531, note b).

<sup>2</sup>i.e. Endowments to provide masses for the dead at stated times. All the practices here referred to were connected with the sacrament of penance and belief in purgatory.

<sup>3</sup>i.e., As a support for the sacrament of penance.

<sup>4</sup>Canon XII. (*Nicene Fathers*, XIV, 27).



the apostles' decree against blood sausage, black jelly and the like, spoken of above.<sup>1</sup> The council speaks, not of murderers, robbers, enemies, but *de militia*, i.e., of regular war, when a prince, king, or emperor is in the field with his banner, in which case, God Himself has commanded, in Romans xiii, that people are to be in subjection and be obedient, even though the rulers were heathen, as St. Maurice<sup>2</sup> and many others did, so long as they do not compel us to fight against God.<sup>3</sup>

Rom.  
13:1

Now let us rule the Church according to this council! First let us ungird the sword from the emperor and then command that the whole world is to keep peace and no one is to begin war, or endure it; for war is forbidden by the Council of Nicæa on pain of seven years' penance. What more do we want? The Church is ruled now; we need no soldiers; the devil is dead; and all the years since the time of this council have been golden years<sup>4</sup>; nay, they have been eternal life itself, in perfect peace, if the council's statute is right and is to be kept.

But we should have to have good and able painters to paint this Church for us so that we could see it; or, if we were blind we should have to have much greater shouters than the choristers of Halberstadt, so that we could hear it. Perhaps the penmen could write the letters C-o-u-n-c-i-l better than we poor Christians, because they have more colors and make better letters; but the work is not there, and we cannot be saved by letters, pictures and shouts. We must speak differently about this matter, and leave the letters, the pictures and the shouts to the papists. It will be for us to live according to the councils and not merely boast of the letters C-o-u-n-c-i-l; for we are to be Christians.

You say that the council is to be understood to speak of those Christians who run after war of their own accord, for

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> The story of St. Maurice and the Theban legion is one of the most famous legends of the Middle Ages. Maurice was commander of the legion, which is said to have been exterminated by order of the Emperor Maximian, because it would not participate in the persecution of Christians; the number of the martyrs was 6,600. Cf. *Realencyk.*, XII, 452 ff.

<sup>3</sup> On this whole subject, see this volume, p. 32 ff.

<sup>4</sup> i.e., Jubilee-years.

the sake of money, and it is right thus to condemn them. In God's name! I am willing to be an ignorant fool and ass for holding the councils so high! Interpret it that way, if you can, and I shall be satisfied! But tell me this! Were you there in the Council of Nicæa, when this article was adopted, that you can say so certainly that this is its meaning? If not, where have you read this? The article says drily, *de militia*, "Of war"; it says nothing of unjust wars. It would not have been necessary for the council to condemn such wars, for they had already been highly condemned by reason among all the heathen, who were not Christians and had no councils.

If a king or prince has to fight and defend himself in a just war, he has to take what soldiers he can get. But if these volunteers<sup>1</sup> are condemned, what will become of emperors, kings and princes, now that there are no soldiers to be had except volunteers? Tell me, are the lords to fight single-handed, or weave straw-men to oppose their enemies? Ask the council's advice, whether this is to be done! Yes, good sir, it is easy to say that a council has given such a commandment, when one looks at the letters, as a cow at a door, not thinking of what goes along with it, or how one can keep it and live by it! And why have the popes and bishops themselves not kept it, who have been the cause of so much war and bloodshed throughout the world, and yet, are always crying, "Councils, Councils! Fathers, Fathers!" only that they themselves act against them and pick out of them the things that they want us to do?

"Ei, Luther, this way you bring the Council of Nicæa under suspicion of sedition! For if we were thus to teach that the emperor and his soldiers were condemned, even though they had a just cause, we should rightly be thought seditious on the basis of our own writings." I say, however, that I am now a good conciliarist, and must be; after a while I shall say more of this, and explain myself. Now I say, as I said before, that the council cannot have been speaking of anything else than regular warfare, as it was

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<sup>1</sup>Zulauffende kriegsr.

then conducted in the Roman Empire, under this same emperor, Constantine, as under his heathen predecessors. The foot-soldiers were then known as *milites*. They were settled citizens, who had permanent pay, so that when the father died, or became too old, the son had to become a soldier, in his father's stead,<sup>1</sup> and was forced to do so. The Turks still retain this custom. I have heard it said that the king of France does practically the same thing in Switzerland, and gives pay even to children.<sup>2</sup> If this is true, it is not an invention.

The horsemen, too, were permanent, hereditary soldiers, and had their pay. They were called *equites*. These horsemen were like our nobles, who have to maintain horses and armor, for which they enjoy their fiefs. Thus the Roman Empire always had a certain number of both infantry and cavalry, receiving permanent pay. Therefore, I say that if the council is to be understood rightly, it must be understood to speak of nothing else than regular warfare, because it had to speak of the Roman soldiery, in which, according to St. Paul's teaching, many Christians had to serve obediently,—men like St. Maurice<sup>3</sup> and his comrades and Jovinian, Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius<sup>4</sup> before they became emperors. But if it was right, before baptism, to serve heathen emperors in war, why should it be wrong to render the same service to Christian emperors, after baptism?<sup>5</sup>

Unless, perhaps, *religio*, in this place, means not the Christian faith, but monasticism. Then I should be caught, and according to this council, I should have to crawl back again into my cowl, whether I wanted to or not, and I should not know how to find St. Peter in heaven, because he was a fisherman before he was an apostle, and plied his fisherman's trade again after he became an apostle, though he had left it for Christ's sake.

<sup>1</sup> This was not the Roman custom in imperial days. The imperial armies were secured by conscription and voluntary enlistment.

<sup>2</sup> This system of "pensions" in Switzerland was bitterly assailed by Zwingli. See Jackson, Ulrich Zwingli.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> All emperors who had distinguished themselves as military leaders.

<sup>5</sup> The phrases "before baptism" and "after baptism" probably refer to the emperors. Cf. Berlin Ed. II, 33 n.

## Monasticism

Now suppose, that *religio* here means monkery, despite the fact that at that time there were no orders, and no such monasteries, or monks as today, although monasticism entered soon and rapidly thereafter. St. Anthony<sup>1</sup> and his followers lived about that time, and all the monks call him father and founder. But at this time "monk" meant what we now call "anchorite" or "hermit," and the Greek word *monachos* means *solitarius*, a "solitary," one who lives alone, apart from men, in a woods or a wilderness, or otherwise quite alone. I know of no such monks now, and there have been none of them for more than a thousand years, unless, perhaps you would call the poor prisoners in towers and dungeons monks; and, sad to say! they are real monks, for they sit alone, away from men. The monks of the papacy are more with people and less alone than any other folk are, for what class or rank in the world is more among people and less apart from them than these monks, unless it be claimed that the monasteries, in city and country, are not among men.

But let us let grammar go and talk of facts. Suppose that *religio* here does mean monasticism, as it existed at that time! Why, then, does this council condemn *militia*, i.e., obedience to temporal rulers, and say that monks, in this obedience, cannot be saved? We could endure it, if monasticism were praised, but when regular *militia* is condemned, as though St. Anthony could not serve the emperor in war with a good conscience, that is too much. Where would the emperor get his soldiers, if they all wanted to become monks and allege that they dared not serve in war? Tell me, good sir, what is the difference between this doctrine and sedition, especially if we were to teach it? And yet we know that this self-chosen monkery is not commanded by God, and obedience is commanded. If the monks would flee away from men, they ought to flee honorably and honestly and not leave a stench behind them; i.e., they ought not, by their flight, to put a stench upon other classes and their pursuits, as though these other things

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<sup>1</sup> St. Anthony entered upon the hermit-life about 270, fifty-five years before the Council of Nicea.

were utterly damnable and their self-chosen monkery must be pure balsam. For when one flees and becomes a monk, it sounds as though he were saying, "Pfui! How the people stink! How damnable is their state! I will be saved, and let them go to the devil!" If Christ had fled thus and become such a holy monk, who would have died for us or rendered satisfaction for us poor sinners? Would it have been the monks, with their strict lives of flight?

True, St. John the Baptist was in the wilderness, though not entirely away from people; but afterwards, when he had reached man's estate, he came back among people and preached. Christ—like Moses on Mount Sinai,—was forty days quite apart from men in the wilderness and neither ate nor drank; but He, too, came back among the people. Well, then, let us hold them for hermits and monks if we like; and yet neither of them condemns paid soldiers as a class, but John says to them, "Be satisfied with your wages and do no one violence or wrong." Christ went to the centurion at Capernaum, in order to help his servant, who served, beyond a doubt, for pay, and Christ does not call his class lost, but praises his faith above all Israel; and St. Peter allowed Cornelius, at Cæsarea, to remain centurion after his baptism, together with his servants, who were there in the pay of the Romans. How much less, then, ought St. Anthony and his monks to have cast a stench upon this ordinance of God, with his new and peculiar holiness; since he was a simple layman, wholly unlearned, and was not a preacher and held no office in the Church. To be sure, I believe that he was great before God, as were many others of his pupils; but the thing he undertook is full of offense and dangerous, though he was preserved in it, as the elect are preserved amid sins and other offenses. Nevertheless, it is not the example of his life that is to be praised, but the example and teaching of Christ and John.

Luke  
3:14

Matt.  
8:10

Acts  
10:1ff.

Now whether *religio* means Christian faith or monkery, it follows from this council that *militia*,—which was at that time obedience to temporal order,—is to be regarded as either disobedience to God or as a stinking obedi-

ence, compared with human, self-chosen monkery. But the legend of St. Martin<sup>1</sup> indicates that *religio* meant Christian faith; for when he desired to become a Christian, he gave up his hereditary *militia*, in which his father had been and in which, when he became too old, he had caused his son Martin to be enrolled in his place, as the law and custom of the Roman Empire prescribed. And this act of his was given an evil interpretation, as though he feared the enemy and therefore fled away and became a Christian. This can be read in his legend. Thus it appears that at that time the notion had already grown up among the people,—not without the preaching of some bishops,—that *militia* was to be regarded a perilous and damned estate and that one who would serve God must flee from it. For St. Martin lived not long after the Council of Nicæa; he was a soldier under Julian.<sup>2</sup>

If we are to keep this council, or re-establish it, we must flee with St. Anthony into the wilderness, make monks out of emperors and kings, and say that they cannot be Christians or be saved; or else preach that they live in perilous and stinking obedience and do not serve God. On the other hand, if we do not keep this council, we must not keep any. One is as good as another, for one Holy Ghost rules them all, and we do not want to have councils in paint or in letters,<sup>3</sup> but real councils that can be followed. But I suspect that there is a swindle here and that the holy fathers never adopted this article, because they would certainly have shown consideration to the emperor Constantine, who had released them from the tyrants, not with St. Anthony's monkery, but with war and sword. It looks as though the other worthless bishops had patched this into the record, or patched it on at a later time.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Martin of Tours (d. 400), the most celebrated of the early monks of the West. The "legend" is probably the *Vita S. Martini* by Sulpicius Severus. So SCHAEFER, 418.

<sup>2</sup> The nephew of Constantine. He was emperor 361-63.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> The Acts of the Council of Nicæa, as of the ancient Councils in general, had been handed down in various forms into some of which forgeries had been inserted; there was no authentic text in Luther's day. The modern texts have been established by methods of higher criticism of exactly the kind that Luther here employs, though his suggestion on this point has not been generally accepted.

Moreover the same council decrees that the Roman bishop, according to ancient custom, is to have the suburbicarian churches commended to him, as the bishop of Alexandria the churches in Egypt. I will not and cannot declare what suburbicariae means, since it is not my word; but it sounds as though it meant the churches located, prior to that time, in Italy, around the Roman churches, just as the churches in Egypt were around the churches at Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> Interpret it as you will, however, I understand well that this council does not give the bishop of Rome any lordship over the surrounding churches, but commends them to him, in order that he may care for them; and it does this, not as though it had to be, *jure divino*,<sup>2</sup> but because of ancient custom. Custom is not *scriptura sacra*, however, or God's Word. Moreover, it takes the churches of Egypt away from the bishop of Rome,—also according to ancient custom,—and commends them to the bishop of Alexandria. Likewise, it is quite thinkable that the churches in Syria were commended to the Bishop of Antioch or of Jerusalem, and not to the Bishop of Rome, since they were situated farther from Rome than Alexandria or Egypt.

Now if this council is to be valid for our churches and its decrees go into effect, we must first condemn the bishop of Rome as a tyrant and burn all his bulls and decretals with fire. For there is not one bull or decretal in which he does not boast, with great bellowing and threatening, that he is the supreme head and lord of all the churches on earth, to whom everything on earth must be subject in order to be saved.<sup>3</sup> And this is nothing else than to say flatly,—“The Council of Nicæa is false, accursed, and damned, because it takes from me this lordship over all things, and makes the Bishop of Alexandria my equal.” But the Turk and the Sultan long ago interpreted this article of the council and put it out of force, by the destruction of Alexandria,<sup>4</sup> so that neither the pope nor we need bother about it. Thus we

<sup>1</sup> This rests, apparently, on Rufinus' version of Canon VI. Cf. *Nicene Fathers* XIV, pp. 16 f.

<sup>2</sup> “By divine right.”

<sup>3</sup> Almost the very language of the bull *Unam Sanctum* of 1302. Cf. *MIRBT, Quellen*. No. 372.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandria fell before the Saracens in 641.

learn that the articles of the council are not all equally permanent, and to be kept forever, like articles of faith.

# Celibacy

I Cor.  
7:2

Moreover, this council decrees that those who make themselves eunuchs, because of the great and unbearable burning of the flesh, are not to be admitted to clergy or the offices of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Again, it decrees that the bishops are to have no women around them or living with them, except a mother, sister, aunts (i.e., sisters of mother or father), or the like near relatives.<sup>2</sup> Here I do not understand the Holy Ghost at all, as He speaks in this council. Those who make themselves eunuchs, because of the unbearable burning of the flesh, are not fit for church offices; and they, too, are not fit who take or have wives, as a protection against this burning, according to St. Paul's advice, in I Corinthians vii. What is intended by this? Is a bishop, or preacher, then, to stick in this intolerable burning and not be able to rescue himself from this perilous state, either by making himself a eunuch or by marrying? And why command one who has a wife that he shall not have other women with him? That is unseemly even for laymen who are married. So, too, the matter of mother, sisters, aunts, would take care of itself, if the bishop had a wife; there would be no need of prohibitions. Or has the Holy Ghost nothing else to do in the councils, than bind and burden His servants with impossible, perilous, unnecessary laws?

The histories say that St. Paphnutius,<sup>3</sup> that important man, opposed the bishops in this council, when they undertook to forbid marriage, even to those who had previously taken wives, and wanted to forbid them to discharge the marriage-duty, even with their own wives. He advised against it, and said that if a man discharged the marriage-duty with his own wife, that, too, was chastity. It is written that he won; but

<sup>1</sup>Canon I (Nicene Fathers, XIV, p. 8.)

<sup>2</sup>Canon III (op. cit., p. 11). This canon does not refer to the marriage of the clergy, but to the presence in their homes of mulieres subintroductae, i.e., women who were neither wives nor near relatives.

<sup>3</sup>CASSIODORUS, *Historia Tripartita*, II, 14. This work, which Luther quotes extensively, was the standard Latin textbook in Church History during the whole Middle Ages. It was composed of excerpts from the Greek Church historians, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. Of Paphnutius little is known, save that he was bishop of a city in Egypt and a member of the Council of Nicea, and that he opposed the prohibition of marriage to the clergy.



these two decrees sound as though the bishops had gone ahead and forbidden wives absolutely; for there were also many unfit and false bishops along with the good majority in the council, such as the Arians and their sectaries, as the histories clearly show. Perhaps they had something to do with it! But of that more hereafter!

We shall now leave the councils, a little while, and take a look at the fathers. To be sure, Augustine leads us somewhat astray, because, as said above,<sup>1</sup> he will have none of the fathers believed, but will have them all in the captivity and under the compulsion of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, we shall have a look at them.

**The  
Fathers:**

St. Cyprian is one of the earliest fathers. He lived long before the Council of Nicæa, in the time of the martyrs, and was himself a celebrated martyr.<sup>2</sup> He taught, and was very stiff about it, that those baptized by heretics must be rebaptized. He stuck to this opinion until his martyrdom, although vigorously admonished by other bishops, and St. Cornelius,<sup>3</sup> bishop of Rome, who was martyred at the same time, would not hold with him. Later St. Augustine had great difficulty in excusing him, and had finally to resort to the idea that this error of his was washed away by the blood which he shed because of his love of Christ. So saying, St. Augustine condemns St. Cyprian's doctrine of rebaptism, which was afterwards repeatedly condemned, and rightly so. But we might well be happy over Cyprian, because in him Christ comforts us poor sinners mightily, by showing that even His great saints must still be human; and, indeed, St. Cyprian, that great man and beloved martyr, stumbled even more in other matters, just as plain, of which there is now no time to speak.

**Cyprian**

**Baptism  
of  
Heretics**

But where do we stand with the fathers who bequeathed this doctrine to St. Cyprian? You may read in the *Ecclesiastical History*,<sup>4</sup> Book VII, pages one and two,

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> He was bishop of Carthage after 248, put to death because of his faith, in 258. His views on rebaptism are found in Migne, 3, 1073 ff., 1089 ff., 1153 ff.; Vienna, 3, 698 ff., 778 ff.; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5, 373 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cornelius was pope 251-53.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vii, 4-6.

what the great bishop Dionysius of Alexandria writes to bishop Sixtus of Rome,<sup>1</sup> saying that in former times, before the bishops in Africa did it, it was done by great and important bishops and was decreed by the Council of Iconium, and that so important a fact should be considered before the practice was condemned. Besides, this article stands plainly in the proceedings of the Nicene Council, that the heretics, Paulianists or Photinians, are to be rebaptized;<sup>2</sup> and this article gives St. Augustine much difficulty in his book *On Heresies*.<sup>3</sup> He had worried long and much with the Anabaptists, the Donatists, but for the sake of this decree of the Nicene Council, he twists out of the difficulty with words like these: "It is to be believed that the Photinians did not keep the form of baptism, as other heretics did." Yes, it is to be believed by anyone who can believe it, when there is no proof! The Photinians either had or made another Gospel than the whole Church had, and it is rather to be believed that they used the common form; for heretics have always been glad to boast the Scriptures on their side. Thus Anabaptism will maintain that it is right, against St. Augustine and all of us, because the Nicene Council and other councils and fathers before it agree with Cyprian.

**The  
Apostolic  
Canons**

Moreover, the *Canones apostolorum*, the *Apostolic Canons*,<sup>4</sup> have now been printed and circulated by many, in order that the Church may again be well ruled. Among them is this canon:<sup>5</sup> "The Sacrament and the baptism of the heretics are to be regarded as nothing, but they are to be rebaptized." It is easy to reckon that if the apostles ordained this, it afterwards came down through the earlier fathers and councils (as Dionysius says) to St.

<sup>1</sup> Sixtus II (257-58); also known as Xystus.

<sup>2</sup> This canon (C. XIX) is not genuine, but is a later addition to the acts of the council. The Paulianists and Photinians are the followers of the heretical bishops, Paul of Samosata (d. 269) and Photinus of Sirmium (d. 376).

<sup>3</sup> In *Migne*, xlii, 34. The Donatists refused to admit the validity of any acts of clergy who were guilty of mortal sin.

<sup>4</sup> A collection of alleged decrees of synods, claiming apostolic origin. The collection was made in the latter part of the fourth or early part of the fifth century and is closely related to the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*. Luther probably knew them in the edition of Merlin, Paris, 1524, or from the work of Crabbe (above, p. 137, note). See *Realenzyk.*, I, 734 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Canon 38.

Cyprian, and thence to the Council of Nicæa; for Cyprian was before the Council of Nicæa. If the apostles decreed this, then St. Cyprian is right and St. Augustine and the whole Church are overcome, and we with him, for we hold to his view; for who will teach contrary to the apostles? But if the apostles did not decree it, then these book-writers and magisters ought all to be drowned and hanged together, because they spread, print, and write such books under the apostles' names; they deserve, too, that no one should believe any of their books or utterances, since they are always producing these books which they themselves do not believe, and loading them upon us, with the letters C-o-u-n-c-i-l-, F-a-t-h-e-r-s. A chorister of Halberstadt could write these letters better than they, if it were only a matter of the letters, with which they endeavor to make fools of us.

Now if St. Cyprian and the Council of Nicæa and others had this rule of the apostles before them, how shall we harmonize the fathers? The apostles and Cyprian want rebaptism; St. Augustine and the whole Church afterwards want to have it considered wrong. Meanwhile, who is preaching to Christians, until this difference is healed and harmonized? O yes! it is good to juggle with councils and fathers, if one only fools with the letters or postpones a council all the time, as has happened these last twenty years,<sup>1</sup> and does not consider, meanwhile, what becomes of the souls, who should be fed with sure teaching, as Christ says in John xxi, *Pasce oves meas*.<sup>2</sup>

John  
21:6

I excuse St. Cyprian, insofar, at least, as he was not such an anabaptist as ours now are; for he held that there were no sacraments at all among the heretics and that they must, therefore, be baptized like other heathen, and the error of his heart was in thinking that he was not bestowing a second baptism, but baptizing an unbaptized heathen; for he neither knows nor holds to a rebaptism, but only one single baptism. Our anabaptists, however, confess that among us and under the papacy there is a true baptism, but since it is given or

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> "Feed my sheep."

received by the unworthy, it is no baptism. This St. Cyprian would not have suffered, much less done.

I have wanted to say this, for myself, about the holy martyr, St. Cyprian, of whom I have a high opinion as regards his character and faith; for doctrine is subject to the saying of St. Paul in I Thessalonians v, *Omnia probate, etc.*<sup>1</sup> But we are not now concerned with what I say, but with making the fathers agree with one another, so that one may be sure what and how to preach to poor Christians; for here the apostles and Cyprian are not at one with St. Augustine and the Church, on the subject of baptism. If we are to follow St. Augustine, we must condemn the apostles and their rules, and the Nicene Council, with the preceding councils and fathers, and with St. Cyprian; on the other hand, if St. Cyprian and the apostles are right, then St. Augustine and the Church are wrong. Who is to preach and baptize meanwhile, until we are at one in this matter? The papists boast the canons of the apostles and councils, together with the fathers, against us, and some of them are incorporated in Gratian's Canon Law, as a token. But suppose that the dam were to break, and some of these canons and councils were found heretical, as this one about rebaptism is, who could then prevent the flood from rolling over us and crying, in its roar, "You lie in everything that you write, say, print, spit, and shout; no one can believe a word of it, even though you bring forward councils, fathers, and apostles in proof of it."

I Thess.  
5:21  
  
The  
Fathers  
Do Not  
Agree

Meanwhile, we cull out of the fathers and councils what we like; they what they like; and we cannot come to agreement, because the fathers are not in agreement any more than the councils are. Dear sir, who is to preach in the meantime to the poor souls who know nothing of this culling and quarreling? Is it feeding Christ's sheep, when we do not know whether we are giving them grass or poison, hay or dung? We are to be doubtful and uncertain until it is settled, and a council decides it! Ah, what poor provision Christ made for His Church, if that is the way things were

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<sup>1</sup> "Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."

to go! No, it must go otherwise than we pretend to prove from councils and fathers; or else there must have been no Church since the time of the apostles; and this is not possible, for there stand the words, "I believe one holy, Christian Church" and "I am with you, even unto the end of the world." The Man must be called *Ego veritas*;<sup>1</sup> fathers and councils, compared with Him, must be called *Omni homo mendax*,<sup>2</sup> if they contradict each other.

Matt.  
28: 20

I say these things, not for the sake of our own people, whom I will show, after a while, what councils, fathers, and Church are, if they do not know it already, which may God forbid! But I am speaking for the sake of the shouters, who think nothing else than that we have not read the fathers and councils. To be sure, I have not read all the councils, and shall not read them all and lose all that time and effort, since I have read the four chief councils thoroughly, better than any of them have done. Also I make bold to say that, after the four chief councils, I will hold all the others of small value, even though I would hold some of them to be good. The fathers, I hope, are better known to me than to these shouters, who pinch out of them what they want and let the rest go, because it annoys them. Therefore we must go at the business another way.

Why do we quarrel? If we would harmonize the sayings of the fathers, let us take up the *Magister sententiarum*.<sup>3</sup> In this work he was diligent beyond measure and went far ahead of us; for he, too, had this same difficulty with the lack of agreement in the fathers and wanted to remedy it, and, in my opinion, he did it better than we would. In no council, nor in all the councils, and in none of the fathers will you find as much as in the book of *Sentences*. The fathers and councils deal with some points of Christian doctrine, but none of them deals with them all, as this man does; at least he deals with most of them. But concerning the real articles, faith and justification, what he says is too thin and weak, though he gives

Peter  
Lom-  
bard

<sup>1</sup> "I am the truth." <sup>2</sup> "Every man a liar." Cf. Rom. 3:4.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Lombard (d. 1164). His *Four Books of Sentences* was the great theological textbook of the Middle Ages and the basis of most of the great systems of scholastic theology.

high enough praise to the grace of God. As was said above,<sup>1</sup> we can allow that Gratian has worked for us at the harmonizing of the councils, in which he went to great pains; but his teaching is not as pure as that of the *Magister sententiarum*, for he gives too much to the Roman bishop and applies everything to him; otherwise he would, perhaps, have done better with the harmonizing of the councils than we now could do.

If anyone would see still farther that the dear holy fathers were men, let him read the little book on the four chapters to the Corinthians by Dr. Pommer,<sup>2</sup> our pastor. From it he must learn that St. Augustine was right, when he said *Noli me is* etc., as we said above,<sup>3</sup> viz., that he will not believe any of the fathers unless he has the Scriptures on his side. Dear Lord God! If the Christian faith were to depend on men, and be founded in human words, what were the need for the Holy Scriptures, or why has God given them? Let us throw them under the bench and lay the councils and the fathers on the desk instead! Or, if the fathers were not men, how shall we men be saved? If they were men, they must also have thought, spoken, and acted sometimes as we think, speak and act, and then said, like us, the prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses"; especially since they have not the promise of the Spirit, like the apostles, and must be pupils of the apostles.

The  
Fathers  
and the  
Scrip-  
tures

I Cor.  
3:12

If the Holy Ghost had been so silly as to expect or trust that the councils and fathers would do everything well and make no mistakes, He would have had no need to warn His Church, before their time, that it should prove and examine all things and that men would build straw, hay, wood on the foundation. By this He foretells, not privately and feebly, but publicly and mightily, that in the holy Church there would be some builders of wood, straw, hay, i.e., teachers, who, although they would stay on the foundation, would suffer loss by fire, but would have to be saved. This cannot

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 143 f.

<sup>2</sup> John Bugenhagen, known as Pomeranus, from the place of his origin. His *Commentary on Four Chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* was published in 1530.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 148.

be understood to mean the heretics, for they lay another foundation, but these stay on the foundation, i.e., in the faith of Christ, are saved, and are called God's saints, and yet they have hay, straw, wood, which must be burned by the fire of Holy Scripture, though without injury to their salvation. So St. Augustine says of himself, *Errare potero; hereticus non ero*, "I can err, but I shall not be a heretic," for the reason that heretics not only err, but will not let themselves be corrected, defend their error as though it were right, and strive against known truth and their own consciences. Of them St. Paul says, in Titus iii, "A heretic shalt thou avoid, after one or two admonitions, and know that such a one is perverted and sins *autokatakritos*, i.e., he remains condemned in obstinate and conscious error. But St. Augustine will confess his error willingly and allow himself to be told of it; therefore he cannot be a heretic, even though he were guilty of error. All the other saints do likewise and are willing to put their hay, straw, and wood into the fire, so that they may stay on the foundation of salvation, as we have done, and still do.

Tit. 3:10

Accordingly, since it cannot be otherwise with the fathers,—I speak of the holy and good ones,—and when they build without the Scriptures, i.e., without gold, silver, precious stones, they have to build wood, straw and hay; therefore we must follow the judgment of St. Paul, and know how to distinguish between gold and wood, silver and straw, precious stones and hay. We must not let ourselves be forced by these unprofitable shouters to think wood and gold one and the same thing, silver and straw one thing, emeralds and hay one thing. We ought to ask them (if it could be done) that they first make themselves so clever as to take wood for gold, straw for silver, hay for pearls. Until then they ought to spare us, and not ascribe to us such folly or childishness.

All of us ought also to observe this wonderful thing about the Holy Ghost,—He willed to give the world all the books of Holy Scripture, both of the Old and New Testaments, out of the people of Abraham and through his seed, and He would not have one of them written by us Gentiles, any

more than He would choose the prophets and apostles from  
 Rom. 3:2 among the Gentiles. So St. Paul says, in Romans iii, "The  
 Jews have the great advantage that the speech of God was  
 Ps. 147: entrusted to them"; and Psalm cxlvii says, "He made known  
 19 His speech to Jacob and His laws to Israel"; He hath not  
 John done so to any Gentiles; and Christ Himself says, in John  
 4:22 iv, "We know that salvation has come from the Jews"; and  
 Romans ix says, "Yours are the promise, the fathers, the  
 Rom. 9:4 law and Christ."

Therefore we Gentiles must not consider the writings of  
 our fathers equal to Holy Scripture, but a little lower; for  
 they are the children and heirs, we the guests and strangers,  
 Matt. who have come to the children's table by grace, without any  
 15:27 promise. Nay, we ought to thank God with humility and,  
 like the Gentile woman, desire nothing more than to be the  
 dogs who gather up the crumbs that fall from the master's  
 table. As it is we go ahead and want to lift our fathers and  
 ourselves up to the level of the apostles, not thinking that  
 God might rather break us also to pieces, since He did not  
 Rom. spare the natural branches, Abraham's seed, or heirs, because  
 11:21 of their unbelief. Yet the accursed abomination at Rome  
 wants to have power even over the apostles and prophets,  
 and alter the Scriptures to suit himself! Therefore Augus-  
 tine is right, when he writes to St. Jerome, as was said  
 above,<sup>1</sup> "I do not believe, dear brother, that you would have  
 your writings considered equal to the books of the apostles  
 and prophets; God forbid that you should desire such a  
 thing!"

**Councils  
and  
Fathers  
Do Not  
Contain  
All  
Chris-  
tian  
Truth** Then, too, there is no council or father in which you can  
 find, or from which you can learn, the whole of Christian  
 doctrine. So the Nicene Council deals only with the doc-  
 trine that Christ is true God; the Council of Constantinople,  
 that the Holy Ghost is God; the Council of Ephesus, that  
 Christ is not two Persons, but one; the Council of Chalcedon,  
 that Christ has not one nature, but two, deity and humanity.  
 These are the four great, chief councils, and they have  
 nothing more for us than these points, as we shall hear; but

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<sup>1</sup> See. p. 148.



this is not the whole doctrine of Christian faith. St. Cyprian discusses how one is to suffer and die, firm in faith, rebaptizes heretics, and rebukes bad morals and the women.<sup>1</sup> St. Hilary<sup>2</sup> defends the Council of Nicæa and its statement that Christ is true God and discusses the Psalms a little. St. Jerome praises virginity and the hermits. St. Chrysostom teaches prayer, fasting, almsgiving, patience, etc. St. Ambrose contains much, but St. Augustine most of all, and therefore the *Magister sententiarum* takes most material from him.

In short, you may put them all together, both fathers and councils, and you cannot cull the whole doctrine of Christian faith out of them, though you keep on culling forever. If the Holy Scriptures had not made and preserved the Church, it would not have remained long because of the councils and fathers. As evidence let me ask, "Whence do the fathers and councils get what they teach and discuss? Think you that they were first discovered in their time or that the Holy Ghost was always giving them something new? How did the Church exist before these councils and fathers? Or were there no Christians before the rise of the councils and fathers? We must, therefore, speak differently of the councils and fathers, and look, not at the letters, but the meaning.

Let this suffice for the first part of this book! Let us catch our breath!

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<sup>1</sup> These are the subjects of some of his best-known writings.

<sup>2</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, "the Athanasius of the West," died 367.

## PART II

First, Concerning the Councils. The word concilium gives us stupid folk immeasurable difficulties, even more than the words "fathers" and "Church." I would not be a judge and master here, but only express my ideas; if anyone else can do better, I wish him grace and luck. Amen.

I take up the saying of St. Hilary's *De trinitate*,<sup>1</sup> *Ex causis dicendis summenda est intelligentia dictorum*, i.e., "He who will understand what is said must see why or for what reasons it is said." *Sic ex causis agendi cognoscuntur acta*.<sup>2</sup> The natural reason teaches the same thing, but I will give a homely illustration of it. If one peasant accuses another and says, "Sir judge, this man calls me a knave and a rascal," these words and letters, by themselves, convey the idea that the accuser is suffering great wrong and that these things are false, and mere lies. But if the defendant comes and gives the reason for these words, and says, "Sir judge, he is a knave and a rascal, for he was beaten out of the town of N. with rods, because of his rascality and it was only with difficulty, by the request of good men, that he was kept from hanging, and he is trying to cheat me here in my own house"; then the judge will get a new understanding of the words, as daily experience in government shows. Before one learns the reason for what is said, it is only words and letters, or choristers' shouts,<sup>3</sup> or nuns' songs.

Matt.  
16:19

So Christ says to Peter, "What thou bindest on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what thou loosest shall be loosed." The pope takes these letters and goes with them into the land of the lotus-eaters, and interprets them thus: "What I do in heaven and earth is right; I have the keys to bind and loose everything." Yes, even if we had eaten beets!<sup>4</sup> But if one looks at the reasons, one finds that Christ is speaking of

<sup>1</sup> Luther was apparently quoting from memory, Hilary's *De trinitate*, ix, 2. Cf. Weimar Ed. L, 547, note a.

<sup>2</sup> "So acts are known by the causes of action."

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 155.

<sup>4</sup> Probably a proverb. The allusion is vulgar.

the binding and loosing of sin. The keys are keys to the kingdom of heaven, into which no one enters except through forgiveness of sin, and from which no one is excluded except those who are bound because of an impenitent life. Thus the words do not concern St. Peter's power, but the need of miserable sinners, or of proud sinners; but of these keys the pope makes two master-keys to all kirgs' crowns and treasuries, to all the world's purse, body, honor, and goods. Like a fool he looks at the letters, and pays no heed to the reasons.

Thus there are many sayings in the Scriptures which, taken literally are contradictory, but if the causes are shown, everything is right. I believe, too, that the medical men and the jurists find a very great deal of this in their books also, like what I said above about the judge. What, indeed, is the whole life of man, except mere antilogia<sup>e</sup>, or "contradictions," until one hears the causes. My antilogists, therefore, are great, fine, pious sows and asses. They collect my antilogies<sup>1</sup> and let the causes alone; nay, they darken the causes diligently, as though I could not also put forward antilogies, out of their books, which are not to be reconciled by any reasons. But enough of this! They are not worth so many words.

We take up now the Council of Nicæa. It came into existence for this reason. The noble Emperor Constantine had become a Christian and had given the Christians peace from their tyrants and persecutors. His faith was so great and earnest and his intentions were so heartily good, that he overthrew his own brother-in-law, Licinius,—to whom he had given his sister, Constantia, and whom he had made co-emperor,—and deposed him because, after many admonitions, he would not desist from his shameful persecution of Christians.

The  
Reason  
for the  
Council  
of  
Nicæa

Now when this fine emperor had made this peace for the Christians and done everything for their good, furthered the churches every way he could, and was so secure that he had the intention to go to war, outside the Empire, with

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., Contradictions.

the Persians: into this fair and peaceful paradise and peaceful time, came the old serpent and raised up Arius, a priest of Alexandria, against his bishop. He wanted to bring up a new doctrine against the old faith and be a big man; he attacked his bishop's doctrine, saying that Christ was not God; many priests and great, learned bishops lapsed to him and the trouble grew in many lands, until, at last, Arius ventured to declare that he was a martyr, saying that he was suffering for the truth's sake at the hands of his bishop, Alexander, who was not satisfied with this teaching and was writing scandalous letters against him to all countries.

When this came to the good emperor's attention, he acted like a wise prince, and wanted to quench the flames before the fire became any greater. He wrote a letter to both Bishop Alexander and Priest Arius, and admonished them so kindly and earnestly that nothing better could have been written. He told them that, with great difficulty, he had made peace in the Empire for the Christians, and they ought not now to start contention among themselves. It would be a great stumbling-block to the heathen, and they would, perhaps, fall away from the faith again (as indeed happened, and he complains of it), and he would be prevented from moving against the Persians. In short, it is a humble Christian letter from so great an emperor to these two men. In my opinion, it is almost too humble; for knowing my own rough pen, I know that I could never have brought so humble a composition out of my ink-bottle, especially if I had been an emperor, and such an emperor.

This letter did not help, however. Arius had, by this time, gained a large following and wanted to go through headlong against his bishop. The good emperor did not desist either. He sent a personal ambassador, a great bishop, famous throughout the world, Hosius of Cordova in Spain, to Egypt, to the two in Alexandria, in order to settle the case. That did not help, either, and the fire spread as when a forest burns. Then the good emperor did the last thing possible. He had the best and most famous bishops gathered from all lands; commanded that they were to be brought

to Nicæa by the imperial asses, horses and mules; and hoped through them, to settle the case peaceably. Truly, there assembled there many fine bishops and fathers; especially famous were Jacobus of Nisibis<sup>1</sup> and Paphnutius of Ptolemais<sup>2</sup> who had suffered great affliction under Licinius and done miracles; but there were also some Arian bishops among them, like mouse-dirt in the pepper.

The emperor was happy and hoped that the case would end well, and he entertained them honorably and well. Then some of them went ahead and brought the emperor schedules of accusation, telling what one bishop had against another; and they asked the emperor's decision. But he rejected them; he had nothing to do with the quarrels of the bishops, but only wanted a true judgment of this article about Christ and had not summoned the council because of their contentions. When they would not desist, he bade that all the schedules be brought to him, and read none of them, but threw them all into the fire. And yet he sent them away with kind words, saying that he could not be judge of those whom God had set as judges over him, and admonishing them to take hold of the chief matter. That is my idea of a wise, gentle, patient prince; another would have been angry at such bishops, and knocked the cask to pieces. At the same time, he showed what was in his mind, when he burned their petitions, without regard to their episcopal dignity, and so reminded them of their childish conduct, since they had been called together on a far more important matter.

When the council began, he sat down among the bishops on a chair lower than theirs. The bishop of Rome, Sylvester, was not present, but, as some say, he had sent two priests. After the bishop of Antioch, Eustathius, who presided at the council, had thanked the emperor and praised him for his kindnesses, the doctrine of Arius was publicly read, for it seems that he was not present,<sup>3</sup> being neither a

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<sup>1</sup> A celebrated opponent of Arianism (d. 338). See *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, III, 243.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Both the *Tripartita* and Rufinus, Luther's chief sources, indicate that Arius was present.

bishop nor a bishop's representative. It was to the effect that Christ was not God, but was created and made by God, as the histories further record. Then the holy fathers and bishops rose from their chairs in indignation and tore the schedule to pieces, and said it was not true. Thus Arius was publicly condemned by the council with great indignation. So deeply were the fathers hurt and so intolerable was it for them to hear the blasphemy of this Arius! All the bishops signed this condemnation, even the Arian bishops, though they did it with a false heart, as afterwards appeared, except two bishops from Egypt, who did not sign. Then the emperor dissolved the council that very day, and he and the council wrote letters throughout the world about this action; and the Emperor Constantine was heartily glad that the case was settled and disposed of, and treated them most kindly, especially those who had suffered persecution.

**The  
Purpose  
of the  
Council:**

**To De-  
fend an  
Article  
of Faith,**

From this it is easy to see why the council came together and what it had to do; namely, preserve the ancient article of faith, that Christ is true God, against the new wisdom of Arius, who wanted, on the basis of reason, to alter and condemn it; and he was himself condemned. The council did not discover this article or set it up as something that was new and had not existed in the Church before, but only defended it against the heresy of Arius. This appears in the fact that the fathers were impatient and tore up the schedule, thus confessing that since the days of the apostles, they had learned and taught another doctrine in their churches. Otherwise what would have become of the Christians who, before the council, for more than three hundred years, since the days of the apostles, had believed and had prayed to the dear Lord Jesus and called upon Him as true God, and had died for it and been miserably persecuted?

**Not to  
Set Up  
New  
Articles**

I must point this out in passing. For the pope's sycophants have fallen into such gross folly as to think that the councils have the power and right to set up new articles of faith and to change old ones. That is not true, and we Christians ought to tear up their schedules also. No councils have done it or can do it; for articles of faith must not

grow on earth, by means of the councils, as from some new, private inspiration, but they must be given and revealed from heaven by the Holy Ghost; otherwise they are not articles of faith, as we shall hear later. So this Council of Nicæa, as I have said, did not invent this article that Christ is God or set it up as a new thing, but it was done by the Holy Ghost, who came from heaven upon the apostles publicly, on the day of Pentecost, and through the Scriptures revealed Christ as true God, as He had promised to the apostles. From the apostles it remained, and came down to this council, and so on down to us; and it will remain till the end of the world, as He says, "Lo, I am with you unto the end of the world."

Matt.  
28:20

If we had nothing with which to defend this article except this council, we should be in a bad way, and I myself should not believe the council, but say, "They are men." But St. John the Evangelist and St. Paul, Peter and the other apostles hold firm and give us a good foundation and defense, for to them it was revealed by the Holy Ghost, publicly given from heaven, and from them the Church had it, before this council, and the council, too, had it from them. Both before the council, when Arius first began, and in the council and after the council, they defended themselves hard with the Scriptures, especially with St. John's Gospel, and disputed sharply, as the books of Athanasius and Hilary bear witness. So, too, the *Historia Tripartita*<sup>1</sup> says, in Book v, chapter 29, "At Nicæa the faith was grounded on the Scriptures of the apostles." Otherwise, if the Holy Scriptures of the prophets and apostles had not done it, the mere words of the council would do nothing and its decisions accomplish nothing.

This article, then, concerning the deity of Christ, is the main thing about this council, nay, it is the whole council. It was the reason for the calling of the council, and on the day that it was adopted, as I said, the council was dissolved.

On another day, however, when the Emperor Constantine is not reported to have been present, they came together again and discussed other matters, which concerned the external,

Other  
Matters  
Dis-  
cussed  
by the  
Council

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 164, note.

temporal government of the Church. Among them, beyond doubt, were the things contained in the schedules that Constantine had previously thrown into the fire, when he would not be a judge; therefore they had to come together and settle these things for themselves, without the emperor. The greater part of them is merely priests' quarreling:—there are not to be two bishops in one city; no bishop of a small church is to be ambitious for a greater one; clerics, or servants of a church, are not to leave their own church and slip hither and thither among other churches; no one is to ordain the people of any bishop without his knowledge and consent; no bishop is to accept a man who has been expelled by another bishop; the bishop of Jerusalem is to retain his ancient privilege of dignity above others<sup>1</sup>; and more of that kind of talk. Who can hold these things for articles of faith? What of them can one preach to the people in the Church? What difference do these things make to Church or people? Unless, of course, they are to be treated as a history from which one can learn that at that time, too, there were everywhere in the Church self-willed, wicked, disorderly bishops, priests, clergy, and people, who were more concerned about honors and power and wealth than about God and His kingdom, and that people needed to be on their guard against them.

It is easy to reckon that Constantine did not assemble the council because of these things, or he would have done it even before the Arian misery began. Why should he worry about how these things were done? They were all things that the bishops had to control for themselves, each in his own church, as they had done before and as the articles themselves declare. It would have been a sin and a shame to assemble so great a council for such little matters; for our human reason, which God has given us, is sufficient for the ordering of these external things, and there is no need for the Holy Ghost, who is to reveal Christ, to turn aside into these matters, which are subject to the reason; unless, of course, one wants to call everything that Christian people do, even

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<sup>1</sup> These are the subjects of the canons of Nicæa. Cf. *Nicene Fathers*, XIV, pp. 8 ff.



eating and drinking, the work of the Holy Ghost. Otherwise the Holy Ghost, because of His teaching, must have other things to do than these external works, subject to the reason.

Moreover all of those who were at this council were not good men; they were not all Paphnutii, Jacobs, and Eustathii. Seventeen Arian bishops were counted among them, though they had to bow and dissemble before the others. The History of Theodoret<sup>1</sup> says there were twenty articles,<sup>2</sup> Rufinus makes them twenty-three. Now whether the Arians or others afterwards added to the number or subtracted from them or set up other articles (for the one which St. Paphnutius is said to have prevented, concerning the wives of priests, is not included) I cannot say. I do know, however, that all these articles have been long dead and buried in the books and gone to decay; also that they can never rise again, as Constantine meant and prophesied by his action when he threw them into the fire and burned them. For they are not kept and cannot be kept. It was building hay, straw, wood (as St. Paul says) on the foundation; therefore, in time, the fire consumed them, as other temporal, transient things pass away. But if they had been articles of faith or commandments of God, they would have remained, like the article concerning the deity of Christ.

I Cor.  
3:12

And yet, among these wooden articles, there is one in which a spark of fire has remained until now. It is the article about the Easter date.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, we do not keep this article quite correctly, as the mathematicians or astronomers prove to us, since the equinox in our time is quite different than in that time,<sup>4</sup> and our Easter is often kept too late in the year. In ancient days, right after the apostles, the dispute over the Easter date began, and the bishops made heretics of one another and excommunicated one another over

The  
Easter  
Date

<sup>1</sup> One of the sources of the *Tripartita*.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., Canons, or decisions.

<sup>3</sup> The agreement on the Roman Easter date is not embodied in the canons of the Council, but announced in the Synodal Letter. (Nicene Fathers, XIV, p. 54.)

<sup>4</sup> Until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar (1582) the equinox was moving forward at the rate of one day in 128 years. See *Encycl. Brit.* (14th ed.), 4, 569 ff.

such little, unnecessary matters, until it was a sin and a shame. Some wanted to keep it, like the Jews, on a certain day according to the law of Moses; the rest, in order not to be considered Jewish, wanted to keep the Sunday after. The bishop of Rome, Victor, about a hundred and eighty years before this council,<sup>1</sup> who also became a martyr, excommunicated all the bishops and churches in Asia, because they did not keep Easter as he did; so early did the Roman bishops grasp at majesty and power! But Irenæus,<sup>2</sup> bishop of Lyons, in France, who had known Polycarp,<sup>3</sup> a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, rebuked him and quieted the case, so that Victor had to be content. Therefore Constantine had to take up this matter and help settle it in the council; and he decreed that the same Easter date should be kept throughout the world; see the *Tripartita*, book ix, chapter 38.

Now there is need for a reformation; the calendar should be corrected and Easter put farther back, where it belongs. But no one can do this except their high majesties, the emperors and kings. They would have to agree to send out a command to all the world at the same time, saying when Easter should henceforth be kept. Otherwise, if one land were to begin without another, and worldly trade, such as yearly markets, fairs, and other business, were to be governed by the present date, the people of that land would get to the markets of another land at the wrong time and there would be a wild confusion and disturbance in affairs of every kind. But it would be a fine thing, and easy to do, if their high majesties would do it, since it has all been finely worked out by the astronomers, and all that is needed is a decree or command. Meanwhile we keep the glimmering ember of the Nicene Council, that Easter remains on a Sunday, though the time see-saw as it may. These are called *festa mobilia*<sup>4</sup>; I call them see-saw festivals,<sup>5</sup> for Easter, with its dependent festivals, changes every year, coming now

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<sup>1</sup> Victor was pope 189-98.

<sup>2</sup> Irenæus was bishop of Lyons after 177.

<sup>3</sup> Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, died as a martyr in 155.

<sup>4</sup> Movable festivals.

<sup>5</sup> Schuekefest.

early, now late in the year, and does not stay fixed, like other festivals, upon a certain day.

This see-sawing of the festivals comes about because the ancient fathers (as I said), right at the beginning, wanted to keep Easter at the time that Moses established, viz., in the full moon of March nearest the equinox; and yet they did not want to judaize entirely, or keep Easter, with the Jews, on the day of the full moon; therefore, as Christians, they let the law of Moses go and took the Sunday after the full moon of March. So it happened last year, 1538, that the Jews kept their Easter on the Saturday after *Invocavit*,<sup>1</sup> as our churches call it; that was five weeks before we kept Easter. Now the Jews laugh at that and make fun of us Christians, saying that we do not keep Easter right, and do not even know how to keep it right. Thus they strengthen themselves in their unbelief. That irritates our people, so that they would gladly see the calendar corrected by the high majesties, since without their co-operation it is not possible, still less advisable.

In my opinion, however, the thing has happened with Easter that Christ speaks of in Matthew ix, "If one patches an old coat with new cloth, the rent becomes worse; and if one puts new wine into old, bad casks, the old hoops are sprung and the new wine leaks out." They want to keep one piece of the old law of Moses; namely, that the March full moon is to be observed: that is the old coat. Then, as Christians, freed by Christ from the law of Moses, they do not want to be subject to the day of the full moon, but would have the following Sunday instead: that is the new patch on the old coat. Therefore the endless contention and the endless see-sawing have made so much trouble in the Church, and must do so till the end of the world, and there can be neither measure nor end to the books about it. Christ has had special reasons for permitting this and letting it go on, for He always proves His strength in weakness, and teaches us to recognize how weak we are.

How much better it would have been, if they had let

Matt.  
9:16

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<sup>1</sup> The first Sunday of Lent.

Moses' Easter law die altogether and had kept none of the old coat at all! For Christ, toward whom this law was directed, has clean abolished it by His Passion and Resurrection; He slew it and buried it forever, rent the veil of the Temple in twain, and then broke and destroyed Jerusalem, with priesthood, principedom, law, and everything. Instead, they should have noted the days of the Passion, the Burial, and the Resurrection, reckoned by the sun, and set a fixed date in the calendar, as they did with Christmas, New Year, the Day of the Holy Kings,<sup>1</sup> Candlemas,<sup>2</sup> the Annunciation,<sup>3</sup> the Feast of St. John,<sup>4</sup> and other days, which are called fixed festivals, not see-saw festivals. Then it would have been known for certain, every year, when Easter must come, and the festivals that depend on it, without this great bother and disputation.

Nay, you say, Sunday must be held in honor because of Christ's Resurrection, and it is called *dies dominica*,<sup>5</sup> on that account, and Easter must be put on it, because Christ rose on the day after the Sabbath, which we now call Saturday. That is, indeed, an argument that moved them; but *dies dominica* does not mean Sunday, but "Lord's Day," and why could not any day on which Easter had come be called *dies dominica*, "the Lord's Day"? Is not Christmas also *dies dominica*, "Lord's Day," i.e., the day on which the Lord's special act, His birth, was done; and yet it does not come, every year, on Sunday? It is called Christ's Day,<sup>6</sup> i.e., the Lord's Day, even if it comes on Friday, for the reason that it has a fixed letter in the calendar, reckoned by the sun. In the same way, Easter, too, could have a fixed letter<sup>7</sup> in the calendar, whether it came on Friday or Wednesday, as is the case with Christmas. That way we should be well rid of the law of Moses, with its March full moon. No one asks today whether the

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<sup>1</sup> Epiphany, Jan. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Purification of Mary (Presentation of our Lord), Feb. 2.

<sup>3</sup> March 25.

<sup>4</sup> St. John the Baptist, June 24.

<sup>5</sup> "The Lord's Day."

<sup>6</sup> German, *Christag*.

<sup>7</sup> In the calendar of Luther's time, each day had a letter. Beginning January 1, the letters ran from A to G, and repeated.

moon is full or not on Christmas, but we stick to the days reckoned by the sun without reckoning by the moon.

It might be argued that, since the equinox holds its place, but the year, in the calendar, is too late and does not keep pace with it, the equinox would be farther and farther from a fixed Easter day, as it would also be farther and farther from the Day of St. Philip and St. James,<sup>2</sup> and from other festivals. What do we Christians care if our Easter came on the Day of St. Philip and St. James, which will not happen, I hope, before the end of the world? Moreover, we hold all days as Easter days, with our preaching and our faith in Christ, and it is enough that Easter be kept once in a year on a special day, as a plain and public and perceptible reminder, not only because one can then discuss the history of the Resurrection more diligently before the people, but also in order that people may arrange their business affairs according to the season of year, just as we have the seasons of St. Michael,<sup>3</sup> St. Martin,<sup>4</sup> St. Catherine,<sup>5</sup> St. John,<sup>6</sup> Sts. Peter and Paul,<sup>6</sup> etc.

But the possibility of making this arrangement has long been denied us, even from the beginning, because the fathers did not do it. The old coat has stayed, along with its big rent, and it may continue to ~~stay~~ this way till the Last Day. Things are going toward their end, and if the old coat has stood the patching and tearing for around fourteen hundred years, it can stand the patching and tearing for another hundred; for I hope that everything will soon have an end. Easter has now been see-sawing for about fourteen hundred years, and it may keep on see-sawing for the short time that is left, since no one will do anything about it, and those who would like to do something cannot.

I am indulging in this long and needless talk, only so that I may have expressed my opinion, in case any of the sects were, in time, to be bold enough to move the Easter festival to another date than that which we now observe. And

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<sup>1</sup> May 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sept. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Nov. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Nov. 26.

<sup>5</sup> June 24.

<sup>6</sup> June 29.

I believe that if the Anabaptists had been learned enough in astronomy to understand this matter, they would have rushed in headlong and, after the fashion of sects, have wanted to bring something new into the world, and keep Easter differently from the rest of the world. But since they are unlearned in the sciences, the devil has not been able to use them as that kind of instrument or tool.

Therefore my advice is to let it alone and let it be kept as it now is, and patch and tear the old coat, and let Easter see-saw back and forth until the Last Day, or until the monarchs agree to change it together, in view of these facts. It breaks no one's legs and St. Peter's boat will not be hurt by it, since it is neither heresy nor sin, but only a solecism, or error, in astronomy, which serves the temporal government rather than the Church, though the ancient fathers, in ignorance, thought otherwise and made heretics of one another and excommunicated one another over it. If the Jews laugh at us, thinking that we do this in ignorance, we laugh back still more, because they keep their Easter so stiffly and so vainly, not knowing that Christ fulfilled it all fifteen hundred years ago, abolished it and destroyed it. What we do is done wilfully and knowingly, and not in ignorance. We know better than they how Easter should be kept according to the law of Moses, but we will not and ought not keep it so, for we have the Lord of Moses and of all things, and He says, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." How much more is He Lord of Easter and Pentecost, which, in the law of Moses, are less than the Sabbath, for the Sabbath is on the tables of Moses,<sup>1</sup> while Easter and Pentecost are elsewhere than on the tables. Moreover, we have St. Paul, who flatly forbids anyone to be bound to the holidays, feasts and anniversaries of Moses.

Matt.  
12:8

Gal. 4:10

Col. 2:16

Therefore it is, and ought to be, in our power and freedom to keep Easter when we will; and even though we made a Sunday of a Friday or vice versa, nevertheless it would be right, so long as it were done in agreement by the rulers

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., The two tables, the Decalog.

and the Christians, as I have said. Moses is dead and buried through Christ, and days or times ought not be lords over Christians, but Christians are free lords over days and times, to fix them as they will, or as seems right to them. Christ made all things free when He abolished Moses; only we let things remain as they are, since there is no peril, error, sin, or heresy in it, and we would not change anything needlessly or at our own individual whim, because of others who also hold to Easter as well as we. We know that we can be saved without Easter and Pentecost, Sunday and Friday, and that we cannot be damned because of Easter, Pentecost, Sunday, or Friday, as St. Paul teaches us.

But to come back to the council, I say that we make too much of this chip of the Nicene Council, and the pope afterwards made it not only gold, silver, precious stones, but even a foundation, i.e., an article of faith, without which we cannot be saved, and they all call it a commandment and an act of obedience to the Church; thus they are far worse than the Jews. The Jews have on their side the text of Moses, commanded at that time by God; but these people have on their side only their own opinions. They go ahead and want to make a new coat out of Moses' old rags. They allege that they are keeping Moses, and yet their case is nothing but a story, or dream, about Moses, who has been dead so long, and was buried, as the Scriptures say, by God Himself—i.e., by Christ, so that no one has found his grave; they would conjure up Moses before our eyes, as though he were alive, and do not see that (as St. Paul says in Galatians v) if they keep one part of Moses, they must keep the whole of Moses. Therefore, if they consider it necessary to keep Easter in the month of March, as a part of his law, they must also keep the whole law of the paschal lamb and become mere Jews and keep, with the Jews, a bodily paschal lamb; if not, they must let it all go, the full moon, too, with all the rest of Moses, or at least, they must not consider it necessary to salvation, like an article of faith. And this is what I believe that the fathers, especially the best of them, did in this council.

Deut.  
34:6

Gal. 5:3

This council, then, dealt chiefly with the article that Christ is true God. It was for this that it was summoned and because of this it is called a council. Beside this, they dealt with certain accidental, physical, external, temporal matters, which it is right to consider worldly, not comparable with the articles of faith, and not to be kept as a permanent law, for they have passed and fallen out of use. The council had to arrange these bodily matters also, for at their time they were appropriate and necessary; but they no longer concern us, in our time, at all, and it is neither possible nor profitable for us to keep them. As an evidence,—it is false and wrong that heretics are to be rebaptized, and yet this article was established by the fathers themselves<sup>1</sup> and not patched in by the Arians or the other worthless bishops.

Thus the Council of Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> also, beside the main points, had to dispose of some non-essential, external articles, which were necessary at that time, about blood, things strangled, and idolatry; but not with the intention that this should remain in the Church as a permanent law, like an article of faith, for it has fallen. Why should we not take a look at this council, too, and see how it is to be understood by the causes that forced it into existence?

The  
Reason  
for the  
Apos-  
tolic  
Council

Acts  
15:5

This was the cause of it. The Gentiles, who were converted by Barnabas and Paul, had, by the Gospel, received the Holy Ghost, as well as the Jews, and yet they were not under the law, like the Jews. Then the Jews insisted strongly that the Gentiles must be circumcised and bidden to keep the law of Moses, or they could not be saved. These were hard, sharp, heavy words,—they could not be saved without the law of Moses and circumcision. The Pharisees who had become believers in Christ insisted on this more than the others, according to Acts xv. Then the apostles and elders came together about this matter, and when they had disputed much and sharply, St. Peter rose and preached the powerful and beautiful sermon of Acts xv, 7-11,—“Dear brethren, ye know how that God chose that through

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> With this whole section compare above, pp. 150 ff.



my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe; and God, the knower of hearts, bare them witness and gave them the Holy Ghost, even as unto us, and made no difference between us and them, and purified their hearts by faith. Why, then, do ye now tempt God by laying a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, in like manner as they."

This sermon sounds almost as though St. Peter were angry and displeased at the hard words of the Pharisees, who said that they could not be saved if they were not circumcised and did not keep the law of Moses, as I said above. He gives them back hard and sharp words and says, "Ye know well that they heard the Word by me and such people as Cornelius and his household became believers, and, as proof,<sup>1</sup> you grumbled against me and accused me, because I had gone to the Gentiles and converted and baptized them (Acts x and xi). What, have you forgotten that when you would lay upon the Gentiles a yoke that neither our fathers nor we could carry? What is it but tempting God, if we lay on others an unnecessary burden, which we ourselves cannot bear any more than they? Especially since you know that God has given them the Spirit without this burden and made them equal to us, after we, too, have received the same Spirit, not because of the burden of good works, but out of grace, as was the case with our fathers also. For since we have been unable to bear the burden, we have deserved wrath far more than grace, because it was our duty to bear it and we had obligated ourselves to do so."

Acts 10:  
1-11:  
18

This is the substance and main affair of this council, viz., **Grace and Law** the fact that the Pharisees wanted to set up, against the word of grace, the works, or merits, of the law, as necessary to salvation. That way, the word of grace would have gone to nothing, together with Christ and the Holy Ghost. Therefore St. Peter fights it and argues against it so hard, and will have men saved entirely by the grace of Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., That Peter had taken the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Christ alone, without any works. Not satisfied with that, he was so bold as to say that all their fathers, patriarchs, prophets, and the entire holy Church in Israel had been saved only by the grace of Jesus Christ and nothing else and been condemned only because they had tempted God by wanting to be saved by other means. I think we can call this real preaching, and knocking the bottom out of the cask! Ought not this heretic be burned to death? He forbids all good works and holds that grace and faith are alone sufficient for salvation, and always has been, in the case of all the saints and all the ancestors of all the world. We must needs be called heretics and devils now, because we teach nothing else than this sermon of St. Peter's and the decree of this council, as all the world now knows better than did the Pharisees whom St. Peter here rebuked.

But St. Peter is far above us, and a strange man indeed, to preach only the grace of God unto salvation, which everybody hears gladly. He also says, that neither they themselves nor their fathers have been able to bear this burden. That is as much as to say, in good German, "We apostles, and whoever we are, together with our ancestors,—patriarchs, prophets, and the whole people of God,—have not kept God's commandments, are sinners, and are damned." He is not speaking of blood-sausage or black jelly, but of the law of Moses, and he says, "No one has kept it, or can keep it"; as Christ says, in John vii, "None of you keepeth the law." That, in my opinion, is preaching the law unto damnation, and making himself a condemned sinner! How does it come, then, that the alleged heir of St. Peter's chair calls himself "Most Holy," and elevates to saintship those whom he chooses because of their works, not because of the grace of Christ? And where do the monks stand, who bear a burden heavier than that of the law,<sup>1</sup> so that they can sell<sup>2</sup> their surplus holiness? We have no such queer folk as Peter, for we dare not hold the patriarchs, prophets, apos-

John  
7:19

<sup>1</sup>i.e., Who do more than the law commands and thus acquire superfluous merit, through works of supererogation.

<sup>2</sup>A reference to the indulgences, which were based on the superfluous merits of Christ and the saints.

ties, and the holy Church as sinners, but must call even the pope "Most Holy" and "Saint of Saints," i.e., Christ.

But St. Peter deserves a very gracious and honorable absolution and is not to be considered queer at all; for in this great article, he preaches, first, the law, that we all are sinners; second, that only the grace of Christ saves us, even the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and the entire holy Church from the beginning, all of whom he makes sinners and condemned men. In the third place, long before the Council of Nicæa, he teaches that Christ is true God. For he says that all the saints must be lost, if they are not saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. To bestow grace and salvation, as Lord, He must be true God, who can take away sin by grace, and death and hell by salvation. This no creature will do, unless it were the "Most Holy" at Rome, though without injury to St. Peter's sermon. In the fourth place, he who holds otherwise, and teaches that sinners can be saved or obtain grace by the law or their own works, is a tempter of God.

It may be said that this "burden" should be interpreted to mean the law of Moses and circumcision, not the Ten Commandments and good works. Let anyone interpret it so, if he please; I am satisfied. If you can keep the Ten Commandments more easily than the Mosaic ceremonies, go on and be holier than Sts. Peter and Paul; I am so weak in the Ten Commandments that I think it would be far easier for me to keep all the Mosaic ceremonies, if the Ten Commandments did not weigh me down. But this is not the time to argue that point; it has been fully discussed, otherwise and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Even human reason must judge and admit, however, that the Ten Commandments, or the works of the Ten Commandments, are not and cannot be called the grace of Jesus Christ, but are something altogether different, and must have another name. Now St. Peter says here that we must be saved through the grace of Jesus Christ; but grace

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<sup>1</sup> Probably a reference to the controversy with the Antinomians. See Weimar Ed. I, 461 ff., and below in this same work.

cannot be received or held with the works of our hands, but with faith, in our hearts. That is certainly true.

Eph. 2:20 It is marvellous to see how St. Peter, who, as an apostle, had the right and power, together with other apostles, to set up this article as something new,—for which reason they are called the foundation of the Church,—nevertheless goes back and cites the holy Church of God of former times, the Church of all the patriarchs and prophets, and as much as says, “This is not a new doctrine, for so all our ancestors and all the saints taught and believed. Why, then, do we undertake to teach another and better doctrine, thereby tempting God and leading our brethren’s consciences astray, and burdening them?”

That, I say, is the substance or chief thing in this council, for which it was called, or came together. When that was decided the council closed and everything was settled. But the papal ass does not see or heed this chief matter and gapes at the other four things that James adds,—blood, things strangled, idolatry, and fornication. By so doing, they hope to strengthen their tyranny, and they allege that since the Church has changed these articles, they have power to change the articles of faith and the councils; that is to say, “We are the Church, we can decree and do what we please.” Listen, papal ass! You are a plain ass; nay, you are a filthy sow. The article of this council has not fallen and has not been changed, but has remained always, from the beginning, as St. Peter says, and will remain until the end of the world; for there have always been holy men, who have been saved only by the grace of Christ and not by the law. Even under the devil of the papacy, there have remained the text and the faith of the Gospel, baptism, the Sacrament, the keys, and the name of Jesus Christ, though the pope, with his accursed lies, has stormed against them and has shamefully misled the world. So, too, it was said of the Nicene Council,<sup>1</sup> that its decree existed before it and remained after it. The decrees of the true councils must remain forever, and they have always remained, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 179.

the chief articles, because of which they came into existence and got the name of councils.

What shall we say, however, about this council of the apostles, when St. James makes exceptions of the four points,—blood, things strangled, idolatry, and fornication? Is not the council contradicting itself, and is not the Holy Ghost in disagreement with Himself? The two speeches are plainly and palpably contradictory,—not laying the burden of the law of Moses, and yet laying it. Play the sophist, if you will, and say that what was spoken of in the council was not the whole law of Moses, but portions of it some of which might be laid and others not laid upon the Gentiles. But that will not do; for St. Paul decides in Galatians v, that if a man keeps one part of the law, he is bound to keep the law entirely, and it is equivalent to acknowledging that one is bound to keep the whole law; otherwise one would pay no heed to it at all. Here, too, there would be new cloth on an old coat, and the rent would be worse. It is also evident that these points are in the law of Moses and nowhere in the Gentiles' law. For where would have been the necessity to lay them upon the Gentiles, if they had already been accustomed to them in their native law? How, then, do we reconcile these two,—no law and the whole law?

James  
Versus  
Peter

Gal. 5:3

Well, if we cannot make them agree, we must let St. James go with his article, and keep St. Peter with his chief article for the sake of which this council was held. Without St. Peter's article, no one can be saved; but Cornelius and the Gentiles whom St. Peter had baptized, at his house along with him, were holy and saved before St. James came along with his article, as St. Peter says in this council. I touched the question above,<sup>1</sup> whether one may, with a good conscience, allow that these points have fallen, since the Holy Ghost rules the council and makes all these decrees; but it is a much more sharply disputed question, whether the council is against itself and disagrees with itself. While desiring to relieve us of an impossible burden, it lays upon us a still more impossible one, when it says that we are,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 153 ff.

at one and the same time, to do nothing and do everything. To be sure, now that it has fallen, we do well to stick to the one part, to St. Peter's articles, i.e., to the genuine Christian faith.

Only the commandment against fornication, which is the fourth point in St. James' article, has not fallen, though, to be sure, the courtesans<sup>1</sup> and condemned lords were on the way to let it fall twenty years ago, when they began to consider fornication not a mortal, but a venial sin, advocating the principle that nature must take its course;<sup>2</sup> and that is the way that the holy people at Rome still regard it. And the reason why these leaders of the blind took this view was that St. James puts fornication with the other three points that have fallen, from which they conclude that if the prohibition of blood, things strangled and idolatry no longer hold, then neither does the prohibition of fornication hold any longer, since it occurs among these others, and except for that, is a natural human act. Let them go; they are worthy of nothing better!

I shall state my opinion; let some one else improve on it! I have now said often that the councils are to be looked at and estimated from the point of view of the chief subject which gave occasion for the council. That is the council in essence,<sup>3</sup> the real body of the council, according to which all else is to be judged, and to which all else is to be fitted, as a garment fits the body that wears it, or has it on; if a man takes it off and throws it away, it is no longer a garment. There cannot be a council or any other assembly,—even a chapter or a diet,—but what, after the chief business is settled, there are not one or two little, accidental matters to be patched up, or arranged. In the Nicene Council, when it had been settled that Christ is true God, there came in the external matters of the Easter date and the quarrels of the priests; and here, too, St. James' article comes in after the chief article of St. Peter.

It was, then, the final opinion and decision of all the

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., The members of the papal court at Rome. Cf. Vol II, p. 88, note 3.  
<sup>2</sup>*Natura petit exitum.*      <sup>3</sup>*Substantialiter.*

apostles, and the council, that men must be saved, without the law or the burden of the law, only by the faith of Jesus Christ. When St. Peter, St. Paul and their party had gained this decision, they were happy and well satisfied, for it was according to this decision that they had worked, and had striven against the Pharisees and Jews who had become Christians and still wanted to retain the law. When St. James, then, added his article, they could put up with it, since this was not laid on the Gentiles as a law or burden of law, as the letter of the council announces: *Nihil oneris*, "We will therefore lay upon you no burden, except that ye abstain from blood," etc. Indeed, they might well have endured it, if St. James had added even more things, such as the rule about leprosy and the like; and the Ten Commandments remain, even without these things. These things, however, are to be no law or burden, say they, but things that are necessary for other reasons. But if a burden is no more a burden, it is good to bear; and if law is no longer law, it is good to keep, like the Ten Commandments. How much more is that true of ceremonies, especially if they are abolished or if very few are retained! Of this more elsewhere! If the pope were to relieve us of his burden, so that it need no longer be law, we should readily obey him, especially if he were to retain a little of it and abolish the most of it. Therefore St. James and his article must endure an interpretation that makes St. Peter's article, concerning grace, without the law, to remain pure and firm and to rule alone, without the law.

Acts  
15:28

We shall also look at the reason for this side-issue of St. James', in order that we may understand this council entirely. With the Jews the law of Moses was, so to speak, inborn; it was suckled into them, made a part of them, ingrained in them from youth up, so that it became almost their very nature, as St. Paul says, in Galatians ii, "We are Jews by nature," i.e., born Mosaic (for he is speaking of the law and not only of birth). Therefore they could not stand the life of the Gentiles, or endure it when they were compared with the the Gentiles among whom they were

James'  
Advice

Gal.  
2:15

Acts  
15:29

scattered in the lands, when they saw that the Gentiles ate blood, things strangled, and meat offered to idols, and yet boasted that they were God's people, or Christians. This moved St. James to guard against this offense, so that the Gentiles might not abuse their freedom too wantonly, to spite the Jews, but act soberly, so that the Jews, so deeply saturated with the law might not be offended and therefore spit upon the Gospel. For, dear God, we must have patience with sick and erring men. Even we drunken Germans are sometimes wise and say, "A load of hay must make way for a drunken man." No one can win his spurs against sick people, or a master's degree over ignoramuses.

And yet St. James acts quite soberly. He entirely disregards the whole law of Moses about sacrifice and all the other points that had to be observed in Jerusalem and Palestine, and takes up only the four points on which the Jews outside Jerusalem, among the Gentiles, took offense. For the Jews, dispersed among the Gentiles, had to see the way the Gentiles acted, had to live with them and, sometimes, eat with them. It was very annoying, and it was wrong, to set before a Jew blood-sausage, have cooked in blood, blood-jellies, and meat sacrificed to idols, especially if I knew that he could not endure it and must take it as an insult. It would be the same as though I were to say, "Listen, Jew! Even though I could bring you to Christ, if I did not eat blood-sausage, or set it before you, I will not do it, but will scare you away from Christ and chase you to hell with blood-sausage." Would that be kind? I shall not ask if it would be Christian! Must not everyone often keep silence and not contradict another, when he sees and knows that things that he would speak and do would be to the other's injury, especially if it were against God? Now the Gentiles of these days were violent toward the Jews and very proud, because they were their lords; the Jews, in turn, were intolerant, because they thought that they alone were God's people. Many histories give powerful testimony to this.

The good advice of St. James was, therefore, the very finest means to peace, and to the salvation of many. It was that the Gentiles, since they had now attained Christ's



grace without the law and without merit, should show themselves helpful, in a few matters, to the Jews, as to sick and erring folk, in order that they also might come to the same grace. It did not harm the Gentiles in the eyes of God to avoid the public, open use of blood, things strangled, and meat sacrificed to idols (though in conscience they were already free, through grace, on all these points) and for the benefit and salvation of the Jews, to desist from giving wanton offense. In the absence of Jews, they could eat and drink what they pleased, without risk to conscience. The Jews, too, would likewise be free in conscience, but could not change the old external custom, for *Consuetudo est altera natura*,<sup>1</sup> especially when it has grown out of God's law. Thus fairness and reason also teach that one should not flout and hinder others, but serve them and be helpful to them, according to the commandment, "Love thy neighbor," etc. Gal. 5:14

These two articles,—that of St. Peter and that of St. James,—are, therefore, contradictory and not contradictory. St. Peter's article is about faith, St. James' about love. St. Peter's article suffers no law, eats blood, things strangled, meat sacrificed to idols, yes, and the devil, too, and gives no heed to it.<sup>2</sup> It deals with God, not with man, and does nothing but believe on the gracious God. St. James' article, however, lives and eats with men; it directs everything to the one purpose of bringing men to St. Peter's article, and guards diligently against hindering anyone. Now the office of love is so discharged on earth that the object of love, that which is loved and helped, is changeable and transient. Love cannot have the same object forever, but one object passes away, and another comes in its place. Thus love must continue to love until the end of the world. When the Jews had been scattered, or became obdurate, and the Gentiles no longer had to practice love toward them, this whole article fell. It was not altered by the power of the Church, as the papists lyingly declare, but since the cause of it was no

Peter  
and  
James  
in Har-  
mony

<sup>1</sup> "Custom is second nature."

<sup>2</sup> The sense is, "It pays no attention at all to foods."

longer there, Christians freely ate blood and black jelly, from which they had for a time abstained on account of the Jews, and for their good, even though they had not been bound, in the eyes of God, to do so, because of their faith.

If St. James had wanted to lay these points upon them as Gal. 5:3 law, he would have had to lay the whole law upon them, as St. Paul says in Galatians v, "He that keeps one law must keep all." That would be flatly against St. Peter's article, which St. James approves.

He puts fornication in among these things, however, though it remains condemned forever in the Ten Commandments; and this is the reason. Among the Gentiles, fornication was considered a small sin; nay, no sin at all. You read this in the books of the heathen, and twenty years ago, as I indicated above,<sup>1</sup> the courtesans and worthless priests began publicly to say and believe the same thing. Among the Gentiles, therefore, it was no greater sin to commit fornication than to eat blood-sausage, hares cooked in blood, blood-jellies, or meat sacrificed to idols. Read in the histories how unwilling the Romans were to take wives, so that the Emperor Augustus had to compel them to marry;<sup>2</sup> for they thought that fornication was right and that their rights were violated when the attempt was made to compel them to marry. Therefore St. James would teach the Gentiles that, even without the compulsion of their rulers, they ought, of their own accord, to give up fornication and live in the married state, chastely and purely. This the Jews did, and they took grave offense at the freedom of fornication, and could not believe that the Gentiles could come to God's grace and become God's people, because of this difference in foods and in living.

The apostles, therefore, did not lay the law upon the Gentiles, and yet they allowed it to the Jews for a time, preaching grace boldly meanwhile. Thus we see that St. Paul when among the Jews, lived as a Jew; when among the Gentiles, as a Gentile; so that he might win all. He circumcised his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 194, note.

<sup>2</sup> By the *Lex Papia Poppaea* (9 B. C.)

disciple, Timothy, who was already a believer, not because it must be so, but, as St. Luke says, for the sake of the Jews of the place, that he might not offend them. Afterwards, he had himself purified in the Temple, with the Jews, and sacrificed according to the law of Moses; all which he did, as St. Augustine says in that fine and now famous word, *Oportuit synagogam cum honore sepe-lire*,<sup>1</sup> i.e., in order to bury Moses, or his church and law, with honor.

Acts  
21:26

How this council and the articles of both St. Peter and St. James were afterwards kept, you will discover abundantly in St. Paul's Epistles, in which he complains everywhere about the false apostles, who insist on the law as a necessity to the detriment of grace, and seduce whole houses and countries, and lead them back to the law; and that under the name of Christ.

After the Nicene Council the case was still worse. The rascal Arius humbled himself and accepted the council in the presence of the Emperor Constantine, even with an oath, and therefore the emperor allowed him to come back. Then he began to fan the flames in earnest and the bishops of his party, especially after Constantine's death, through his son, the Emperor Constantius, whom they had won over, played the game so horribly that throughout the world Constantius drove out all the true bishops, except two,—Gregory and Basil.<sup>2</sup> Some say, here, that Constantine, the father, became an Arian before he died and in his will commended to his son, Constantius, an Arian priest who had been faithfully commended to him by his sister, Constantia, on her death-bed, and that it was through him that the Arians afterwards became so powerful.

Arius  
After  
the  
Nicene  
Council

Such histories warn us to pray for great lords, because the devil seeks them most of all, since he can do the greatest harm through them; also that we ourselves are to be careful, and not readily to give credence to sectarian spirits, even if

<sup>1</sup> "It was right to give the synagogue an honorable funeral." The passage is not found in Augustine.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390), and Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea (370-79). Luther's information is not accurate. It rests on Rufinus and the *Tripartita*. Cf. SCHAEFER, L. als Kirchenhistoriker, 277.

they humble themselves as completely as this rascal Arius did. It is said, *Aliquando compugnuntur et mali*,<sup>1</sup> but they keep behind the hill till they get air and room,<sup>2</sup> and then they fall to, like Arius, and do the things that they had in mind before. I do not wonder greatly that the fathers laid such severe and lengthy penance on renegade Christians. They would have had experience with them, and would have known how false their humility was, and how hard it was for them to humble themselves to penitence sincerely and from their hearts, as Sirach also says, *Ab inimico reconciliato*,<sup>3</sup> etc.

Briefly, if one does not know the meaning of *osculum Judae*, "a Judas-kiss," let him read the story of Arius under Constantine, and he will have to say that Arius went far beyond Judas. He deceived the good Emperor Constantine with these fair words,—“We believe in one God, one Word, by Whom all things were made,” etc. Tell me, what Christian could hold these words heretical, or think that Arius still held Christ to be a creature? But that became clear when he came to trial. In the same way Auxentius, bishop of Milan, the immediate predecessor of St. Ambrose, fooled the people with such words that, on first impression I almost became angry at St. Hilary, when I read the words, *Blasphemia Auxentii* on the title page of *Auxentius' Confessions*.<sup>4</sup> I would have staked my body and soul on Auxentius' word that he held Christ to be true God. I hope, too, that amid these blind and deceptive words, many good, simple folk remained by their former faith and were preserved in it, because they were unable to understand these words otherwise than as an expression of the faith that had existed from the beginning.

<sup>1</sup>“Sometimes even the wicked are defeated.”

<sup>2</sup>i.e., They bide their time until their chance comes.

<sup>3</sup>“Never trust thine enemy: for like as iron rusteth, so is his wickedness. Though he humble himself and go crouching, yet take good heed and beware of him.” *Ecclesiasticus* 12: 10, 11 (A. V.)

<sup>4</sup>*Auxentius* (d. 374) was denounced as a heretic by Pope Damasus and declared deposed (370), but kept his bishopric until his death. Hilary of Poitiers published his confession of faith as an appendix to his *Book Against the Arians*, entitling it “An Illustration of the Blasphemy of Auxentius.” Cf. *Realencyk. Arts. Damasus, Hilarius von Poitiers*, and *Weimar Ed. L*, 570, note a, where he is mistakenly referred to as the successor of Ambrose.

Indeed, no one could understand them otherwise unless he knew the private interpretation that the Arians gave them.

Because it is so necessary for Christians to know this illustration, and because the ordinary reader of history does not examine it so closely and does not think how profitable it is as a warning against all other spirits of division, whom the devil, their god, makes so slippery that they can never be seized or grasped;—for these reasons I shall briefly state this case, under a few heads.

First, Arius taught that Christ was not God, but a creature. Then the good bishops extorted from him the confession that Christ was God like St. Peter and Paul and like the angels who are called in the Scriptures “gods” and “Sons of God” (I Corinthians viii, John x, Psalm lxxxii, Job xxxviii).

**Arian-  
ism**

I Cor.

8:5

John

10:34

Ps. 82:6

Job 38:7

Secondly, When the fathers discovered this they forced him farther, until he and his followers granted that Christ was real and true God. They submitted to these words for the sake of appearances, since this had been the teaching theretofore in all the churches. Among themselves, however, (and this is especially true of Eusebius of Nicomedia, Arius' chief patron) they interpreted these words as follows:—*Omne factum dei est verum*, “Everything created, or made, by God is true and real; what is false God has not made, therefore we are willing to confess that Christ is real, true God, though among ourselves we hold Him to be a made God, like Moses and all the saints.” Here they admitted everything that we now sing on Sunday in the churches, since the Nicene Council, *Deum de deo, Lumen de lumine, Deum verum de deo vero*.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, When this false trick came out, and it became known that, in spite of these words, they still held Christ to be a creature, the dispute became sharper until they had to confess that Christ had existed before the whole world. Who, then, could believe otherwise than that Arius and his bishops were true Christians and had been unjustly con-

<sup>1</sup> “God of God, Light of light, Very God of very God.”

demned by the Nicene Council? This is what they were at soon after the Nicene Council, which had made short work of them and stated the faith as it was; for they wanted to undo the Nicene Council, and attacked one point after another.

Fourthly, This blind evasion was noticed, viz., that Christ was to be and be called a creature, though with the explanation that He was before all the world, i.e., He was created or made before all the world, or before all other creatures. Col. 1:15 Then they were compelled to confess that all the world and John 1:3 all things were made by Him, as John i says; yet among their own people they interpreted this to mean that Christ was first made, and then all things were made by Him.

Fifthly, It was then easy for them to confess, *genitum, non factum*,<sup>1</sup> viz., that Christ was born of God, not created; born as all Christians, born of God, are sons of God (John i); not created among other creatures, but before all creatures. John 1:12

Sixthly, Then it came to the heart of the matter, viz., that Christ is *homousios*<sup>2</sup> with the Father, i.e., that Christ is of one and the same deity with the Father, and has one and the same power. Then they could no longer find any trick or hole or scheme or hoax. *Homousios* means "of one essence, or nature," or "of the same and not of a second essence," as the fathers had decreed in the council, and as is sung in Latin, *consubstantialis*; some afterwards said *coexistentialis*, *coessentialis*. They had accepted this at Nicæa, in the council, and they still accepted it when they had to speak in the presence of the emperor or of the fathers; but among themselves they attacked it bitterly. They declared that this word was not in the Scriptures; they held many councils, even in Constantine's time, seeking to weaken the Council of Nicæa; they started much trouble. At last they made the hearts of our party so timid that even St. Jerome was perplexed, and wrote a letter of complaint to Damasus, Bishop

<sup>1</sup> "Begotten, not made."

<sup>2</sup> "Of one substance."

of Rome, and began to ask that the word *Homousios* be scratched out. "For," he says, "there is some kind of poison in the letters, which makes them so objectionable to the Arians."

There is a Dialog<sup>2</sup> still extant, in which Athanasius and Arius dispute before an official named Probus about this word *Homousios*. When Arius insisted vigorously that this word was not in the Scriptures, Athanasius caught him in his own trap, and said, "Neither are these other words in the Scriptures, *innascibilis, ingenus Deus*," meaning "God is unborn"; for these the Arians had used to prove that Christ could not be God, because He was born and God was unborn; and Probus decided against Arius. For while it is true that in matters concerning God nothing should be taught except the Scriptures (as St. Hilary says in his *De trinitate*'), that means only that nothing should be taught that is different from the Scriptures. It cannot be held that one cannot use more words or other words than those that are in the Scriptures, especially in controversy. When the heretics would falsify the case with false evasions and pervert the words of Scripture, it was necessary to comprise in a short word of summary the meaning, which the Scriptures put in many sayings, and ask whether they held Christ *homousios*; for this was the meaning of the Scriptures in all the words which they perverted, in their own circles, with false interpretations, but had freely confessed before the emperor and in the council. It is just as though the Pelagians were to try to entrap us with the words "original sin" or "Adam's-plague,"<sup>3</sup> because these words do not occur in the Scriptures, and yet the Scriptures do powerfully teach what these words mean, saying that we are conceived in sin (Psalm li), are all by nature children of wrath (Ephesians ii), and must all be sinners because of one man's sin (Romans v).

Ps. 51:7

Eph. 2:3

Rom.  
5:12

<sup>1</sup> The letter in Migne, 22, 356; Vienna, 54, 64.

<sup>2</sup> This dialog (Migne, 62, 155 ff.) passed in the sixteenth century as a work of Athanasius. Its author was Vigilus of Thapsus who lived at the end of the fifth century. Realecyk. 20, 640 ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Unborn; the unbegotten God."

<sup>4</sup> *Detrin.* I, 18. Nicene Fathers, ix, 45.

<sup>5</sup> *Adams-scuche*.

Con-  
stantine  
Not an  
Arian

Now tell me, if Arius were to come before you today and confess the whole creed of the Nicene Council, as we sing it today in our churches, could you hold him a heretic? I myself would say that he was right. And suppose that underneath it all he was a rascal and believed something different and afterwards interpreted the words differently and taught differently; would I not have been finely deceived? Therefore I do not believe that Constantine became an Arian, but that he stuck by the Nicene Council. What happened to him was that he was deceived, and believed that Arius held just what the Nicene Council did. He demanded an oath from him to that effect, as was said above,<sup>1</sup> and then commanded that they should receive him again in Alexandria. When Athanasius would not do this, because he knew the false Arius better than Constantine did, he had to be driven out; for it may well be that Constantine got the idea that Arius, this good Christian, had been condemned at Nicæa out of envy or jealousy, especially since the Arians, Eusebius of Nicomedia above all, espoused his cause with the emperor, filled his ears with stories, and glorified Arius. For great kings and lords, even though they are good men, do not always have angels and St. John the Baptist (Mark vi) about them at court, but often Satan (I Kings xxii) and Judas and Doeg (I Samuel xxii), as the book of Kings show. It is a good sign that Constantine, before his death, recalled Athanasius, though the Arians strove hard to prevent it (III Tripart 11).<sup>2</sup> Thus he shows that it was not his desire to reject the Nicene Council and its doctrine, but that he would gladly have brought everything into unity.

Mark  
6:18

I Kings  
22:22

I Sam.  
22:9

That is just what some of our false papal scribblers are doing now. They pretend that they would teach faith and good works in order to bedeck themselves and besmirch us, as though they had always so taught and we had wrongly accused them of teaching otherwise. Their intension is, when they have decorated themselves with sheeps' clothing, as though they were just like us, to bring their wolf back again

<sup>1</sup>Cf. p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Tripartita, IV, 1-3.



into the sheep-pen. It is not their serious purpose to teach faith and good works; but since, like the Arians, they cannot keep their poison and wolfishness and set them up again by any other means than this sheeps' clothing of faith and good works, they deck themselves up in it and conceal the wolfskin, until they get back in the sheep-pen. They must be treated as they treat our people, and we must bid them revoke their abominations and prove their revocation with deeds, by abolishing all the abuses that ruled, contrary to faith and good works, in their churches, among their people. Thus they can be known by their fruits. If they do not do this, then their mere words and gestures are sheep skins, and cannot be believed. So Arius, too, should have recanted, acknowledged his error, and actually contradicted himself, in doctrine and life, as St. Augustine contradicted his Manichæism,<sup>1</sup> and as many men today are contradicting their former papistry and monkery; among whom, by God's grace, I can count myself. But they will have it that they have not erred, and will not do God the honor of confessing it; just as the Arians wanted to defend their lies and would not have it thought that the council had condemned them.

The lesson of these histories we should well observe, especially those of us who must be preachers and have command to feed Christ's flock, so that we may see well to it, or be good bishops, as St. Peter says in I Peter v (for *episcopus*, or bishop, means one who looks well to things, who is alert, who watches diligently), so that we may not be taken unawares by the devil. Here we see how he can twist and disguise himself in such masterly style that he becomes far fairer than an angel of light (II Corinthians xi), and false bishops are holier than the true bishops, and the wolf is more righteous than any sheep. We have not to deal now with the plain, black, papal spirits<sup>2</sup> outside the Scriptures; they are accommodating themselves to the Scriptures and to our doctrine, want to be like us and yet tear us

I Pet.  
5:2

II Cor.  
11:14

<sup>1</sup> Augustine was a Manichæan before he became a Christian, and later wrote extensively against the Manichæans.

<sup>2</sup> Polter Babst geister.

to pieces. The Holy Ghost alone must help, and we must pray with diligence, or we have lost entirely.

From all this it is evident why the council was held,—not on account of outward ceremonies, but on account of the high article of the deity of Christ. It was around this that the controversy arose; it was this that was chiefly discussed in the council and afterwards assailed by the unspeakable ragings of the devil, in which the other articles were not remembered. The wretched business lasted nearly three hundred years among the Christians, so that Augustine holds that Arius' punishment in hell becomes greater every day, as long as this error lasts, for Mohammed came out of this sect. It is evident, too, that what I undertook to show is true, viz., that this council neither devised nor established anything new, but defended the old faith against the new error of Arius. From this fact one cannot conclude that the councils have power to devise and set up new articles concerning faith and good works, still less that the pope at Rome has this power, as they falsely claim.

Let this be enough, for the time, about the first chief council of Nicæa.

The  
Reason  
for the  
Council  
of Con-  
stanti-  
nople

The second chief council, that of Constantinople, was assembled about fifty years after the Nicene Council,<sup>1</sup> under the Emperors Gratian and Theodosius.<sup>2</sup> This was the cause of it. Arius had denied the deity of Christ and the Holy Ghost. Meanwhile a new sect arose, the Macedonians, for one error always brings another, one disaster another, without end and cessation.

These Macedonians praised the decision of the Nicene Council that Christ was God and vigorously condemned Arius. They taught, however, that the Holy Ghost was not true God, but a creature of God, through whom God moves, enlightens, comforts, and strengthens the hearts of men, and does all that the Scriptures say the Holy Ghost does. This sect took strong hold among many great, learned, and able

<sup>1</sup> The Council was held in 381.

<sup>2</sup> Gratian was emperor 375-383; Theodosius, 379-395.

bishops. It came about this way. Macedonius<sup>1</sup> was bishop of Constantinople, the great capital of the whole Eastern part of the Empire, where the imperial court was. This bishop began the sect, and the fact that the foremost bishop, the bishop of the imperial residence, Constantinople, taught thus, produced a great effect. Almost everyone in the lands around Constantinople, which depended on Constantinople, fell to him and attached themselves to him, and Macedonius was not idle; he urged his cause hard, and would have liked to draw the whole world into his following, as the devil does in all sects.

The good bishops were all too weak to resist this sect of bishops. Formerly a simple priest of Alexandria, Arius, had started such a confusion; but here it was not a priest, nor even an ordinary bishop, but the bishop of the foremost city, the bishop of the imperial palace at Constantinople, that started the confusion, and the bishops had to appeal again to the emperor to assemble another great council to resist this error. This the good Emperor Theodosius did and put it in the city of Constantinople itself, in the district of the church where Macedonius had been bishop; just as the other time Constantine had put the Nicene Council at Nicæa, where the bishop was Theognis, who helped Eusebius of Nicomedia to support Arius and afterward to bring him back again.

The next year Damasus, bishop of Rome, also held a council<sup>2</sup> and would have liked to have the matter dealt with at Rome, so that the Roman See might get the power to call councils and judge all cases. It was to be known as a universal council; for as the highest bishop in the world, he called the fathers who had held the council at Constantinople in the previous year; but they would not come. However, they did write him a fine Christian letter, telling him what

The  
Council  
and the  
Pope

<sup>1</sup> The personal history of Macedonius is quite unclear. It is connected with the bitter struggle between the Arians and the orthodox in the middle of the fourth century. Whether he was the founder of the sect that bears his name is open to question. See Loors in *Realencyk.* 12, 41 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Luther's source for all of the following is the *Tripartita*. Damasus I was pope 366-84. The letter of the synod is found in *Tripart.*, 9, 13 and 14 (*Migne*, 69, 1129 ff.).

they had done in the Council of Constantinople. They notified him, among other things, that they had condemned the heresy of Macedonius and that they had appointed new bishops of Constantinople, Antioch and Jerusalem. O, but they ought not to have done that without the knowledge and consent of the bishop of Rome, who wanted to have the sole power to call councils (which he was not able to do), to judge all heresy (which he could not), and to change bishops (which was not his business)!

They gave him other good slaps, besides. They told him that in the new church at Constantinople (for the city of Constantinople had been built recently) they had appointed Nectarius bishop, at Antioch Flavian, at Jerusalem Cyril. These three points were most vexatious to the bishop of Rome; nay, it was intolerable that he should have to hear or see them. First, they call Constantinople a new church and appoint a bishop there, though without the knowledge and consent of the bishop of Rome, no new church or new bishop ought to be created. The second is still worse, for they call the church at Antioch the first and oldest of the churches, in which (as they prove by St. Luke, in Acts xi) the believers in Christ were first called Christians; moreover St. Peter and St. Paul and many of the greatest apostles preached there for more than seven years. That was the same as to say in my German: "Listen, Lord bishop of Rome! You are not the first or highest bishop; but if there is to be only one church, it ought more fittingly be the Church of Antioch, which has on its side the Scriptures of St. Luke and actual facts, while Rome has on its side neither Scriptures nor facts!"

Acts  
11:26

They were fine and able people, however, and they wanted to check the proud spirit of Rome soberly and gently, in Christian love and humility, and, as Sirach says,<sup>1</sup> "to spit on the sparks," and exhort the bishop of Rome to remember that the Gospel had not come from Rome to Antioch, but from Antioch to Rome; therefore, if it came to a question of precedence, Antioch, the oldest church, ought rightly

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiasticus 28: 14.

to have precedence over Rome, the new church. This ambition, as the words show, had vexed these fine, holy fathers sorely, and that was proper. If there had been a Doctor Luther in the council, so mild a letter would not have been written to the bishop of Rome, if he could have had anything to do with it. In a word, there were people in this council with whom none of the bishops of Rome of all time could compare.<sup>1</sup>

The third point is worst of all, when they call the church at Jerusalem the mother of all churches. The reason is that Christ, the Lord, was Himself bishop there, and as a sign of it, sacrificed Himself on the cross for the sins of all the world. There the Holy Ghost was given from heaven, on the Day of Pentecost. There all the apostles together ruled the Church; not Peter only, of whom the bishop of Rome boasts. No single one of these things happened at Rome. Hereby they soberly admonish the bishop of Rome to remember that he is very far from being the bishop of Jerusalem, the mother-church, but that his church at Rome is a daughter-church, which did not have Christ and the apostles and did not bring Jerusalem to the faith; on the contrary, he and his church were brought to the faith by it. St. Paul humbles the Corinthians the very same way, telling them that the Gospel did not come from them, but came to them from others.

II Cor.  
10:14

At last, however, they go beyond all bounds and appoint a patriarch in the new church at Constantinople, and do it without the previous knowledge and consent of the bishop of Rome, as though, in matters of this kind, his knowledge made no difference at all. Here, as the pope's flatterers themselves say, is the beginning of the everlasting controversy and contention between the bishop of Rome and the bishop of Constantinople over the primacy, or supreme authority. For when the bishop of Constantinople, though he was in a new city, was made a patriarch and given an equal position with the bishop of Rome, the latter feared that the bishop of Constantinople would claim the primacy;

Rome  
and  
Con-  
stanti-  
nople

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<sup>1</sup>Nicht kundten das wasser reichen.

as actually happened afterwards. The bishops of Constantinople argued that the emperor had his residence, or court, at Constantinople and not at Rome, and Constantinople was called New Rome; therefore he must be the supreme bishop because he was bishop of the imperial city and court. On the other hand, the bishop of Rome argued that Rome was true Rome, and the emperor was called Roman emperor, not Constantinopolitan emperor, and Rome was earlier than Constantinople. They clawed at each other with such childish, womanish, foolish scurrilities that it is a sin and a shame to hear and read them.

The dispute lasted until the time when Phocas was emperor, the man who had the good Emperor Maurice, his lord and predecessor, whose captain he had been, and whom the histories call a saint, beheaded with his wife and children.<sup>1</sup> This pious Cain confirmed to the pious Pope Boniface<sup>2</sup> of Rome the supremacy over all bishops, and there could have been no better man to confirm this supremacy than this shameful murderer of emperors. Thus Rome had as good a beginning for its papacy as it had had for its empire, when, in earlier days, Romulus slew his brother, Remus, so that he might rule alone and call the city after himself. Nevertheless, the bishops of Constantinople cared nothing for that, and the contention went on and on, though meanwhile the Roman bishops, over and above the confirmation of Phocas, began to deck themselves with fig-leaves and cried, with great bellowings, that the church of Rome was supreme, not by man's ordering, but by Christ's own institution, according to Matthew xvi, *Tues Petrus*, etc.<sup>3</sup> But the people at Constantinople saw that those at Rome were unlearned and quoted Christ's words falsely and inappropriately, and they did not accept the argument. Thus the

Rev.  
12:1

Matt.  
16:18

<sup>1</sup> In 602 Phocas headed a revolution in Constantinople which deposed Maurice, who had been on the throne since 582. Maurice and his whole family were put to death. Pope Gregory the Great hailed the revolution as an act of God against a tyrant. Phocas was emperor until 610, when he was deposed and killed in another revolution, headed by Heraclius. See *Cambridge Mediaeval History*, ii, 282 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Boniface I was pope for eight months in 607. He had been the papal diplomatic representative at Constantinople and was on the friendliest terms with Phocas, from whom he secured the recognition of Rome as "the head of all churches." See Realencky, 3, 289.

<sup>3</sup> "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

two churches, Rome and Constantinople, wrangled over the worthless primacy with lame, vain scurrilities, until at last the devil devoured them both: that of Constantinople by the Turks and Mohammed, that of Rome by the pope and his blasphemous decrees.

I tell all this in order that it may be seen what misery was caused by this fine Council of Constantinople, because the bishop of that city was made patriarch. To be sure, the misery would not have been avoided even though no patriarch of Constantinople had been appointed, for the ambitious devil's head at Rome had already begun to make these demands of the bishops everywhere (as was said above), and if the bishop of Constantinople had not fallen foul of him, he would have rubbed against those of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch; for he would not put up with the decree of the Council of Nicæa, in which he had been put on equality with the bishop of Alexandria and beneath the bishop of Jerusalem. He will be head of the Church without the councils and fathers, *jure divino*<sup>1</sup> as he roars, blasphemous, and lies in his decrees.

This, then, was the second great council, at Constantinople. It did three things. First, it confirmed the doctrine that the Holy Ghost is true God and condemned Macedonius, who held and taught that the Holy Ghost is a creature. Second, it deposed the heretical bishops and appointed real bishops, especially at Antioch and Jerusalem. Third, it made Bishop Nectarius of Constantinople a patriarch, which made the bishops of Rome wild, mad, and crazy, although the good fathers may have done it with the best intentions.

What  
the  
Council  
Did

The first thing is the main thing, and is the sole reason why this council was held. From this the intention of the council can be understood. It was to do no more, and did no more, than preserve the article concerning the deity of the Holy Ghost. When it had done that, it had finished the work for which it was summoned.

The second thing, the deposition of bishops, is not an article of faith, but an external tangible work. Even rea-

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<sup>1</sup> "By divine right."

Acts  
1:26

son ought and can do it, and for this it is not necessary, as it is when dealing with articles of faith, to have the Holy Ghost in any special way, or to assemble a council. Therefore it must have been done at another session, after the session of the council. They did not establish anew the churches or bishoprics at Antioch and Jerusalem, but they let them stay as they had been from the beginning; all they did was to put other persons into them. The offices must always have been in the Church from the beginning and must continue until the end; but other persons must be put into them constantly;—Matthias after Judas (Acts i), and living bishops after those who have died. This is not properly the work of a council but may be done,—indeed it must be done,—both before and after the councils, as the necessities of the churches demand. Councils cannot be held every day, but there is daily need for persons who can be put in the offices of the Church as often as they fall vacant.

The third thing was new. They made a patriarch with the best of human intentions. How it turned out, we have told above; what a shameful wrangling and contention the two bishops started over it, so that it is plain that the Holy Ghost did not order it so; for it is not an article of faith, but an external, tangible work of the reason, or of flesh and blood. What difference does it make to the Holy Ghost, which bishop has precedence and which comes after? He has other things to do than this worldly child's-play. This is not only a lesson, to teach us that the councils have no power to establish new good works, still less articles of faith; but it is also a warning that councils ought not to appoint or establish any thing new, for they should know that they are not assembled for that purpose, but to defend the old faith against new teachers; though, to be sure, they may put new persons in old offices (but then persons cannot be called articles of faith or good works, since they are uncertain, mortal men), and this has to be done outside the councils, in the churches, more than in the councils; nay, it must be done every day.



Even the fathers of the council themselves confess that they established nothing new, when they write, as has been said to Damasus, bishop of Rome, and say, among other things, "We know that this is the old, true faith, which is according to baptism, and teaches us to believe on the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Indeed, they say nothing at all about the third point, the patriarch of Constantinople, perhaps because they thought that this was not the point on account of which they had come to the council and it was no heresy, if a Christian were not to hold, as an article of faith, that the bishop was a patriarch; just as today there are many people who are neither heretics nor lost because they do not hold the pope to be the head of the Church, notwithstanding his councils, decretals, bulls and bellowings. Perhaps, on the other hand, they did not do this by unanimous consent, but it was done by the Emperor Theodosius; for the other histories declare that Theodosius instigated it and pushed it; and he had no power to set up articles of faith.

Since, then, they themselves say and confess that it is the old, true faith, in which we were baptized and instructed, why shall we grant to the councils the high authority to set up new articles of faith and burn as heretics all those who do not believe them? That is not understanding the councils rightly and knowing what a council is and what its office and action are; it is rather looking at the letters and giving them all power, even over God. Of that more hereafter! We shall now take a brief glance at the other two chief councils besides.

The third great council<sup>1</sup> was held under Theodosius II,<sup>2</sup> grandson of Theodosius I, of whom I spoke in discussing the second council. This emperor summoned two hundred bishops to come together to Ephesus. The Latin writers would like to weave the pope into the story, but it is a fact, nevertheless, that it was not the pope, but the emperor, who had to summon this council, for now that

The  
Reason  
for the  
Council  
of  
Ephesus

<sup>1</sup> The Council of Ephesus, 431.

<sup>2</sup> Emperor 408-450.

there was a patriarch at Constantinople who was on equal footing with the bishop of Rome, the bishops of the East cared far less about the bishop of Rome than before. It was, therefore, impossible for the bishop of Rome to call this council, especially at Ephesus, which lay far across the sea, in Asia. If he could have done so, he would have put it nearer Rome, as Damasus tried to do with the former council, that of Constantinople.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, he is said to have had his legates there. That may be, but they did not preside.

The reason for this council was as follows: The dear fathers and fine bishops were gone,—St. Ambrose, St. Martin, St. Jerome, St. Augustine (who died that very year), St. Hilary, St. Eusebius,<sup>2</sup> and others like them, and in their place had come other fathers, who were not their equals. Therefore the Emperor Theodosius was no longer willing to have a bishop of Constantinople chosen from among the priests or clergy of the city of Constantinople, for the reason that they were commonly proud, ambitious, and headstrong and usually caused nothing but trouble. Even St. John Chrysostom<sup>3</sup> was such a person, as the *Historia tripartita*<sup>4</sup> tells. Therefore the emperor had an *advena*,<sup>5</sup> as they called him, brought from Antioch. His name was Nestorius and he was a man of strict and chaste life, loud-voiced and eloquent, and violently opposed to all heretics. He had to become bishop and patriarch of Constantinople. So the emperor made a great effort and had no success; he tried to run out of the rain and fell in the water.

Nestorius

Nestorius began to defend his priest Anastasius, who had preached that the Holy Virgin should not be called Mother of God, for since she was human she could not bear God. This gave offense to all Christians and they took

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose died 397; Martin, 400; Jerome, 420; Augustine, 430 (not 431); Hilary of Poitiers, 367; Eusebius of Caesarea, 339.

<sup>3</sup> The great preacher of Antioch, who became patriarch of Constantinople in 398. He was involved in the Origenistic Controversy and deposed 403. He died in 407.

<sup>4</sup> *Tripart.* X, 3, 13. "His pride was an offense warranting condemnation."

<sup>5</sup> "A foreigner."

no other meaning from it than that he held that Christ, born of Mary, was not God, but a mere man, like all of us; and out of this there arose such a state of affairs that the emperor had to call a council to help things.

The great bishops came together to Ephesus, though slowly,—Nestorius with many others, Cyril from Alexandria, Juvenalis from Jerusalem, and when John of Antioch delayed his coming, Cyril (who was opposed to Nestorius) and Juvenal condemned Nestorius, and he and his followers, in turn, condemned them. When John of Antioch arrived and found this division, he was angry at Cyril because he had so hot-headedly and hastily condemned Nestorius, and the two went at each other and each condemned the other and deposed the other from his bishopric.

When Nestorius saw that such a disturbance had arisen, he said, "Oh, let us do away with what causes so much trouble and admit that Mary may be called Mother of God." But this recantation did not help; he had to stay under condemnation and in exile. To be sure, the two bishops, of Antioch and Alexandria, did condemn one another, even after the council, when they were back at home again; but at last they were reconciled. Nevertheless, it is offensive and distressing to read how these people in high station acted. They needed a Constantine to throw their contentious letters into the fire;<sup>1</sup> but those who could have done that were gone. Now if Nestorius was in such error that he held Christ not for God, but for mere man, then he was justly condemned, for his teaching was much worse than that of Arius or Macedonius.

That is the third great council. It did nothing more than that. And yet we see that it set up no new articles, but defended the old, true faith against the new doctrine of Nestorius, if that is what he taught; and on this basis, we cannot grant the councils the power to establish new articles. For that Christ is true God was defended before, in the Councils of Nicæa and Constantinople, as a true, old article, held from the beginning and proved by the Holy Scriptures and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 177.

now testified over against the new heresy of Arius. The other decrees established there have to do with bodily matters and are not articles of faith and we pass them by.

Nes-  
torius'  
Error

In order, however, that we may understand this council thoroughly, we shall say a little more about it. At one time I myself could not understand what Nestorius' error was, and thought that Nestorius denied the deity of Christ, and held Christ for nothing more than a mere man, as the pope's decrees and all the papal authors say; but by their own words, when I looked at them rightly, I was forced to another conclusion, for they accuse him of making Christ two Persons, God and man. Some, who also could not understand the case, imagined that he taught as follows: Christ was first born of Mary as mere man, and then lived such a holy life that the Godhead united with Him and thus He became God. And their writings are so confused that I think that they themselves do not know, to the present day, why they condemned Nestorius. Observe that they admit that Nestorius held Christ for God and man; only he is said to have made two Persons of Him. From this it is certain that Nestorius did not hold Christ for a mere man, as we all thought, since he also holds Him for God, as their own words say. The only knot that remains is that he is said to have taken Christ, really and truly God and man, for a dual Person, divine and human. That is one thing.

Now he who divides Christ and makes two Persons of Him, makes two Christs,—a divine Christ who is altogether God and not a man at all, and a human Christ, who is altogether man, and not God; otherwise there could not be two Persons. It is sure, however, that Nestorius did not believe that there were two Christs, but only one single Christ, as their own words imply, when they say that Nestorius held Christ, viz., the one, same, real Christ and no other, to be two Persons. Therefore it must be false and wrong to say that he held Christ to be two Persons. The two things cannot stand together, viz., that Christ is two Persons and yet is the same, single Christ; but, as said, if there are two Persons, there are two Christs, and not one

Christ. But Nestorius holds to no more than one Christ. Therefore he could not have held Christ to be two Persons, or he would have contradicted himself and said yes and no in one statement. So, too, it is not written anywhere in the histories that Nestorius held Christ to be two Persons, except that the popes and their histories make that quibble; though even they themselves admit that they imagine that Nestorius taught that after His birth from Mary, Christ became God, or was united to God in one Person. Their conscience or their misunderstanding forced them to this, since they had to admit that Nestorius did not teach that there was more than one single Christ.

The question then is, What was Nestorius condemned for, and why was this third great council held against him, if he taught nothing else except that Christ was true God and man, and was one Christ, not two, i.e., one Person in two natures, as we all believe, and as the whole Church has believed from the beginning? For it appears that the pope and his followers have invented the story that Nestorius held Christ for a mere man and not also for God, and that he held Christ for two Persons, or two Christs. This appears, I say, not only from the histories, but from the very words of the popes and their writers. What, then, was Nestorius' error, so that we may know the cause of this council?

You may read it for yourself in a page or two of the Tripartite History, Book XII, chapter 4, and can read it in half of a quarter of an hour. There is written everything that can actually be known about Nestorius and this council. See if I hit it. The fault was this: Nestorius was a proud, unlearned man, and when he became a great bishop and patriarch, he thought that he must be considered the most learned man on earth, and needed neither to read any of the books of his forbears or of other people, nor to learn to speak after their fashion. On the contrary, since he was eloquent with a loud voice, he wanted to be a self-made Doctor or Master, and would have it that whatever he said was right. With this pride, he attacked the statement that Mary was the mother, or bearer of

God. Then he found other proud bishops who were not pleased with his pride, especially Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>1</sup> for there was no Augustine or Ambrose at hand. Nestorius had learned in the church of Antioch that Christ was true God begotten of the Father (the belief defended in the Council of Nicæa) and afterwards born of the Virgin Mary, as true man. Nestorius had no doubts on either of these points; nay, he persecuted the Arians, condemned in the Nicene Council, so violently that he caused many deaths and much bloodshed by it. So firmly did he hold that Christ is true God and man.

The  
Two  
Natures

Moreover, he admitted that Christ, God's Son, was born of the Virgin Mary according to His humanity, not according to His divinity, as we, and all Christians, also say. But there he struck a difficulty. He would not have it that Mary should be called, on that account, mother of God, since Christ was not born of her according to His divinity; or, to speak plainly,—he believed that Christ did not have His deity from her, as He had His humanity. That was his whole fight! God cannot be born or have His divine nature from a human being; and a human being cannot bear God or give God His divine nature. The unlearned, rude, proud man stood on the phrase, "God born of Mary," and interpreted "born" by grammar or philosophy, as though it meant to have the nature of deity from the one who bore Him. Thus the *Tripartita* says, "He held these words in abomination"; and so do we and all Christians, if we understand them in that sense.

From this it is evident that Nestorius, an ignorant and proud bishop, thinks of Christ in a really serious way, but, in his ignorance, does not know what he is saying. He has no right to speak of such matters, and yet he would be a Magister and speak of them. We, too, know very well that Christ did not derive His deity from Mary; but it does not follow that it must, therefore, be false to say, "God was born of Mary" and "God is Mary's Son" and "Mary is God's mother." I must give you a plain illustration. If a

<sup>1</sup> Bishop of Alexandria, 412-44, the great opponent of Nestorius and the chief literary defender of the orthodox Christology.

woman bears a child, a worthless Nestorius (so the *Tripartita* calls him!) can be proud and ignorant, and raise the quibble, "This woman has borne the child, but she is not its mother, for the reason that the soul of the child is not of her nature or blood, but is infused from elsewhere, i.e., from God. Therefore, this child is, indeed, born of the woman according to the body; but since its soul is not from her body, she is not the child's mother, because she is not the mother of its soul."

Such a wretched sophist does not deny that the two natures, body and soul, are one person; nor does he say that there are two persons, or two children; but he confesses that two natures, body and soul, are one person, or one child, and that the mother has borne not two children, but one; but he does not see what he is denying or what he is saying. Just such a man was Nestorius. He admits that Christ is God and man in one Person; but since His deity does not come from His mother, Mary, she ought not to be called the mother of God. This was rightly condemned in the council, and ought to be condemned. Although Nestorius holds a right opinion on one point of the main matter, viz., that Christ is God and man, nevertheless, the other point is not to be endured. It is expressed in words and sayings, like "God was not born of Mary and was not crucified by the Jews." The sophist says correctly, on one point, that the mother cannot bear, or give, the child's soul, but it is not to be endured when he says that the child is not the mother's natural child and the mother not the child's natural mother.

In a word, the proud unlearned bishop started a Greek, that is, a bad quarrel as the Roman Cicero says of the Greeks, *Jam diu torquet controversia verbi homines gracculos, contentionis cupidiores, quam veritatis.*<sup>1</sup> He who admits that a mother has borne a child, which is both body and soul, ought also to say and believe that the mother has borne the whole child,

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<sup>1</sup> "This long time controversy over words tortures the little Greeks, who are more zealous for contention than for truth." Cicero, *de oratore*, I, II.

and is its mother, even though she may not be the mother of its soul. Otherwise it would have to follow that no woman would be the mother of a child, and the commandment, "Honor thy father and mother" would be abolished. It should, therefore, be said that Mary is the true, natural mother of the child called Jesus Christ, and the true mother and bearer of God. Thus whatever else can be said of children's mothers can be said of her; they suckle their children, bathe them, give them food and drink, and Mary suckled God, rocked God, made broth and soup for God. For God and man are one Person, one Christ, one Son, one Jesus, not two persons, not two Christs, not two sons, not two Jesuses; just as your son is not two sons, two Hanses, two shoemakers, etc., even though he has two natures, body and soul,—body from you, soul from God alone.

Communica-  
tio  
Idio-  
matum

Nestorius' error, then, is not that he holds Christ to be a mere man or that he makes two Persons of Him; on the contrary he confesses that there are two natures in one Person, but he will not admit a *communicatio idiomatum*. I cannot say that in German in one word. *Idioma* means that which attaches to a nature, or is its property, such as dying, suffering, weeping, laughing, eating, drinking, sleeping, sorrowing, rejoicing, being born, having a mother, sucking the breast, walking, standing, working, sitting, lying down, and other things of the kind. These are called *idiomata humanae naturae*, that is, properties that attach to a man by nature, things that he can, or even must, do or suffer; for *idioma* in Greek is the same thing as *proprium* in Latin. Let us call it "property." Again, *idioma deitatis*, is a property of divine nature, such as to be immortal, omnipotent, infinite, not to be born, or eat, drink, sleep, stand, walk, sorrow, weep. Why say more? To be God is an immeasurably different thing than to be a man. Therefore the *idiomata* of the two natures cannot coincide. That is the opinion of Nestorius. Now if I preached thus: "Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth (for so the Gospels call Him,



*filium fabri*'), goes on the street and brings his mother a pitcher of water and a pennyworth of bread, to eat and drink with her; and this carpenter, Jesus, is real, true God in one Person"; then Nestorius would grant me that and say that was true. But if I were to say: "God goes on the street, and gets water and bread, to eat with His mother"; then Nestorius would not admit that, but would say, "Getting water, buying bread, having a mother, eating and drinking with her,—these are *idiomata*, properties, of human not of divine nature." Therefore, if I were to say: "The carpenter, Jesus, was crucified by the Jews, and this same Jesus is true God," Nestorius would say that this was true. But if I say, "God was crucified by the Jews," he says, "No! The Cross, suffering and death are not the *idioma*, or property, of divine, but of human nature."

Matt.  
13:55

If ordinary Christians hear this, they can think nothing else than that he holds Christ to be a mere man, and separates the persons, which he does not intend to do, though his words make it appear that he is doing it. Thus it is apparent what an altogether mad saint and ignorant man he was; for after admitting that God and man were united and mingled in one Person, he can nowise avoid the conclusion that the *idiomata* of the two natures should also be united and mingled. Otherwise what would it mean, to say that God and man are united in one Person? His folly is exactly that against which it is taught in the schools, *Qui concedit antecedens bonae consequentiae, non potest negare consequens*;<sup>1</sup> in German we say, "If the one thing is true, the other must be; if the second is not true, neither is the first." Anyone who admits that Grete is your wife, cannot deny that her child is your child, if she is a good wife. When these things are taught in the schools, no one can believe that there can be anybody crude enough to deny them; but ask the governors and the jurists whether they have not often had parties before them who confess one thing and will not admit the consequences of it.

<sup>1</sup> "The carpenter's son."

<sup>2</sup> "One who admits the premise of a good conclusion, cannot deny the conclusion."

It might be alleged that Nestorius had been acting the rascal when he confessed that Christ was God, and one Person. No! The proud man was not clever enough for that; he meant it seriously. In one of his sermons, says the *Tripartita*, he cried, "Nay, my dear Jew, you need not act so proudly! You could not crucify God." What he would say is that Christ is God, but God was not crucified. And in the council, in the presence of Bishop Cyril, he says, "Many confess that Christ is God, but I shall never say that God is *bitris* or *trinitris*"<sup>1</sup> that is to say, "Jesus is God, as many of us confess, but that God is born two or three times,—that I shall not teach." What is in his mind, as the *Tripartita* indicates,<sup>2</sup> is that God and death do not agree together, for he thinks it terrible to hear that God died. His meaning was that, according to His divinity, Christ is immortal; but he had not enough brains to express it that way. Then there is the added fact that the other bishops were also proud, and did not consider how the wounds could be healed, but how they could be torn open and made worse.

Speaking logically, then, it must follow from Nestorius' opinion, that Christ is a mere man and two persons; but that was not his opinion, for the crude, unlearned man did not see that he was proposing the impossible when he seriously held Christ to be God and man in one Person and, at the same time, would not ascribe the *idiomata* of the two natures to the Person of Christ. He wants to hold the first statement as true, but he will not grant that which follows out of that first statement. Thus he shows that he himself does not rightly understand what he is denying.

We Christians must ascribe all the *idiomata* of the two natures to His Person. Christ is God and man in one Person. Therefore what is said of Him as man must also be said of Him as God, viz., Christ died, and Christ is God, therefore God died; not God apart from humanity, but God united with humanity. Of God apart from humanity both statements are false, viz., Christ is God and God died. Both

The  
True  
Christ-  
ology

<sup>1</sup> "Double or triple."

<sup>2</sup> XII, 5.

are false, for God is not man. But if Nestorius thinks it strange that God dies, he should remember that it is also strange that God becomes man, for thereby the immortal God becomes something that must die, suffer, and have all the human *idiomata*. What would that man be, with whom God is personally united, if he were not to have true human *idiomata*? He would have to be a phantom, as the Manichæans had taught.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, what is said of God must also be ascribed to the man, i.e., God created the world and is almighty; the man Christ is God; therefore, the man Christ created the world and is almighty. The reason for this is that God and man have become one Person and therefore the Person bears the *idiomata* of both natures.

Ah, Lord God! Over this blessed, comforting article men ought always rejoice, in true faith, without disputes and without doubts! We ought to sing, and give praise and thanks to God the Father, that He has allowed His dear Son to become like us, a man and our brother! But that wretched Satan, through proud and ambitious and wicked people, raises up such bad feeling that this dear and blessed joy must be hindered and spoiled! We Christians must know that if God is not in the scale to give it weight, our side of the scale sinks to the ground. That is to say, if it cannot be said that God, not a mere man, died for us, we are lost. But if God's death and a dying God are in the balance, His side goes down and ours comes up, as though it were light and empty; but He can also leap up again, or spring out of the scale. He could not be in the scale, however, unless He had become a man like us, so that we could speak of God dying, God's suffering, God's blood, God's death. For in His own nature, God cannot die; but when God and man are united in one Person, then, if the man dies with whom God is one thing, or one Person, then it can be truly called God's death.

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<sup>1</sup> Manichæism had a place for Jesus, as the manifestation of light, which it held to be equivalent with good, but the Manichæan doctrine of matter, which made it all evil, prevented the acceptance of His humanity. See Realenck. 12, 193 ff., Cf. Enc. of Religion and Ethics, 8, 398.

Besides, this council condemned too little of Nestorius' doctrine. It dealt only with the one *idioma*, viz., that God was born of Mary. Therefore, the histories say that, in this council it was resolved, against Nestorius, that Mary should be called *theotokos*, "the one who bore God," though Nestorius denied to God in Christ all the *idiomata* of the human nature such as death, cross, passion, and everything that is not suitable to God. They ought, therefore, to have resolved, not only that Mary was *theotokos*, but also that Pilate and the Jews were crucifiers and murderers of God. Afterwards, indeed, he was condemned with reference to all the *idiomata*, by saying, "Nestorius denies that Christ is God and one Person." That is true in effect and in logic,<sup>1</sup> but it is too blunt and far-fetched, and Nestorius could get no other idea from it than that he was being treated unjustly and wrongly; for he had never taught that in so many words, but, on the contrary, had always said that Christ was real and true God and was not two persons, and he had persecuted the Arians hard in behalf of this belief. People like him cannot make syllogisms or draw logical conclusions, and see that one who denies the *idiomata*, or properties, of a nature, can be said to deny the substance, or nature, itself. The decision should have run thus,—“Although Nestorius confesses that Christ is true God and man, one Person; nevertheless, since he does not grant the *idiomata* of the human nature to the divine Person of Christ, he is wrong, and it is the same as if he had denied the nature itself.” And they ought not to have picked out the one *idioma*, which concerned His mother, Mary. In that way, the case of this council would have been more clearly understood and it is my opinion that very few people have understood it heretofore. From Platina<sup>2</sup> and his ilk, it is impossible to understand it.

I, too, have had to deal with Nestorians, and they fought

<sup>1</sup>Ex consequenti.

<sup>2</sup>Bartolomeo Sacchi of Piadena, best known as Platina (1421-81). Under Pope Sixtus IV, he was director of the Vatican library. His *Lives of the Popes* (*Vitae Romanorum Pontificum*) was, in Luther's day, the best available source of information for the history of the papacy. See SCHAEFER, *Luther als Kirchenhistoriker* pp. 127 ff.

against me very stubbornly, saying that the deity of Christ could not suffer.<sup>1</sup> For example, even Zwingli wrote against me concerning the text, *Verbum caro factum est*.<sup>2</sup> He simply would not have it that *factum* should agree with *verbum*, but would have it read, *Verbum caro facta est*,<sup>3</sup> for the reason that God could not be made anything.<sup>4</sup> At that time I did not know that that was the notion of Nestorius, because I did not understand the council, but I recognized the error of it from the Holy Scriptures, Augustine, and the Master of Sentences.<sup>5</sup> Who knows how many Nestorians there are under the papacy, who boast greatly about this council, and do not know of what it is that they are boasting? The human reason would be wise on this point and not suffer it that God should die or have a human kind of being, even though it believes, because of custom, that Christ is God, as did Nestorius.

Modern  
Nestor-  
ians

John  
1:14

So, then, this council established nothing new concerning the faith, as was said above, but defended the old faith against the new opinions of Nestorius, and we cannot use it as an example, or grant, because of it, that the councils have power to fix new or different articles of faith. This article was in the Church from the very first, and was not newly made by the council, but was preserved by the Gospel, or the Holy Scriptures. There it stands, in St. Luke i, that the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that that which should be born of her was the Son of the Highest; and St. Elizabeth asks, "Whence cometh it that the mother of the Lord should come to me?" All the angels, at Christmas, say, "To you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Moreover, St. Paul says, in Galatians iv, "God sent His Son, born of a woman." These texts, I know for sure, hold firmly enough that Mary is mother of God. So St. Paul says, in I Corinthians ii, "The princes of this world

No New  
Article  
of Faith

Luke  
1:32

Luke  
1:42

Luke 2:4

Gal. 4:4

I Cor.  
2:8

<sup>1</sup> i.e. That Luther's teaching was incompatible with belief in the deity of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> "The Word was made flesh."

<sup>3</sup> "The flesh was made Word."

<sup>4</sup> In the Sacramentarian Controversy. Cf. Luther's statement in *Vom Abendmahl Christi Bekenntnis*, of 1528 (Weimar Ed. XXVI, 317). See note in Weimar Ed. L, 591.

<sup>5</sup> Peter, the Lombard.

Acts 20:28 crucified the Lord of Majesty"; and in Acts xx, "God has purchased the Church with His own blood" (though God has no blood, if we are to judge by human reason); and in Phil. 2:6f. Philippians ii, "Christ, though He was equal to God, became a servant and was found in the fashion of all men"; and the childrens' creed, *Symbolum Apostolorum*, says, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived, born of Mary, suffered, was crucified, dead, buried," etc. There stand the *idiomata* of human nature plain enough, and they are ascribed to the only Son and Lord, Whom we believe to be equal to the Father, and true God. Let this be enough about this council.

The Council of Chalcedon in Pontus, or Asia, about twenty-two or twenty-three years after the third great council, by the Emperor Marcian, who was Emperor at Constantinople after Theodosius II.<sup>1</sup> It was in the year 455.<sup>2</sup> Thus the four great councils were held within the space of one hundred and thirty years, for the council at Nicæa was held in 327,<sup>3</sup> but before them and along with them and after them, there were many other councils, held here and there by the bishops themselves, without the emperors. These four, however, could not come together without the emperors. Such very faulty men were the holy fathers that it was not easy for one of them to yield to another, as the histories, unfortunately, show. And this is a special consolation for us, to show us that we need not despair; since the Holy Ghost was in some of these fathers and they had to be holy and be saved.

The Actual History Uncertain What the reason for this council was, I myself would be glad to learn from someone else, for there is no trustworthy history that comes down this far. The *Ecclesiastica*<sup>4</sup> ends with the first council, that of Nicæa; the *Tripartita* and Theodoret<sup>5</sup> with the third council, at Ephesus; from that point on we must believe the histories of the popes

<sup>1</sup> Marcian's dates are 450-58. <sup>2</sup> The actual date was 451. <sup>3</sup> Actually 325.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. Luther used it in Rufinus' translation.

<sup>5</sup> Theodoret ends with the year 428. Luther seems to have known his work only through the excerpts in the *Tripartita*.

and their followers only, and to believe them is a dubious procedure, for strong and evident reasons. Up to the present time, they have so drawn everything into their own hands, and have told and still tell such lies about their own majesty, that no one can build any certainty upon them. Now advise me how I am going to be saved, since I do not understand this council or know what it did? And what has become of the dear saints and Christians who, through all these centuries, have not known what this council established? For there must always be saints on earth, and if they die, other saints must live, from the world's beginning to its end or the article of the Creed would be false, "I believe one holy, Christian Church, a communion of saints," and Christ would have been lying, when He said, "I am with you until the end of the world." There must, I say, always be living saints on earth, wherever they may be, or Christ's Kingdom would have an end and there would be no one to pray the Lord's Prayer, confess the Creed, be baptized, go to the Sacrament, be absolved, etc.

Matt.  
28:20

Well, then, Platina and others say that this was the reason for it. There was at Constantinople an abbot,—they called him Archimandrite,—named Eutyches, who brought out against Nestorius another doctrine, and taught that Christ was one Person, in the divine nature only. Against this, the fathers in the council determined that Christ is one Person and two natures; and this is true and is the Christian faith. According to the pope's histories, however, he taught that after the deity had taken on humanity and Christ had thus become one Person, only the deity remained and Christ is to be considered only God, and not man. If that was Eutyches' opinion, he is almost another Nestorius, who is said to have taught that Christ is two persons and yet one Person, for Eutyches must also have taught that in Christ there are two persons, and yet only one Person; and Pope Leo says in a letter that Eutyches and Nestorius teach contradictory heresies.<sup>1</sup> And, indeed, it is true that he who teaches that Christ is two and yet one in person or nature

<sup>1</sup> Pope Leo I (440-461). The letter referred to is Ep. LX, to Maximus of Antioch.

and, again, that in Christ there are two natures and yet one nature, is teaching contradictions, nay, self-contradictions.

If the papists had known, however, that these were not the opinions of Nestorius and Eutyches, they ought properly to have refrained from such language and spoken a little more plainly and in *terminis propriis*, i.e., they ought to have used their very words. Otherwise the heretics think that they are being treated unjustly and overcome with false words and false interpretations of their words, as I said above about Nestorius.

That Eutyches did not hold that there was only one nature in Christ appears from the papists' own words, when they say, Eutyches confessed that there are two natures in Christ, viz., the deity assumed humanity. One who confesses this says that Christ has more than one nature. But they do not tell us what Eutyches means by saying that afterwards only the divine nature in Christ remained, without the human nature. Thus they let the matter hang in the air, as though Eutyches had held, at the same time, that Christ had two natures and not two, but one. Thus the histories afterwards become uncertain and obscure, so that no one can understand what Eutyches meant or what the pope's histories mean, and thus they lost this council and the reason for its assembling. We cannot find it from the histories of the councils or the papal letters. On the other hand, the pope's historians ought not to write so roughly and clumsily, and babble out their own words to us, unless we are to gather from them that they understood this council almost as well as I do.

**Eutyches'  
Error**

I shall speak out my own ideas. If I hit the mark, well and good; if not, the Christian faith will not fall. Eutyches' opinion, like that of Nestorius, is wrong on the subject of the *idiomata*, but in a different way. Nestorius will not ascribe the *idiomata* of humanity to the divinity in Christ, though he stands firm in the belief that Christ is God and man. Eutyches, on the other hand, will not ascribe the *idiomata* of divinity to the humanity, though he holds, with equal firmness, that Christ is true God and man. It is



as though I preached that the Word, God's Son, is creator of heaven and earth, equal to the Father in eternity, and that Word, the same Son of God, is true man. This Eutyches grants me. He has no doubts about that. But if I go on and preach that this man Christ is creator of heaven and earth, Eutyches stumbles and is outraged at the words, "A man creates heaven and earth." He says, "No! Such a divine *idionoma* as creating heaven and earth, does not befit man." But he does not stop to think that he has previously admitted that Christ is true God and man in one Person, and now will not admit the conclusion, the *consequens bonae consequentiae*.<sup>1</sup> For one who confesses that God and man are one Person must simply and absolutely admit that, because of this union of the two natures in one Person, this man Christ, born of Mary, is creator of heaven and earth, since that is what He has become in one Person, viz., God, who created heaven and earth.

John 1:3

John  
1:13f.

This conclusion Eutyches does not understand and yet says firmly, "Christ is God and man," not seeing that he must deny the human nature of Christ, if he refuses to ascribe the divine *idionomata* to the human nature. That would be dividing the Person, and Christ would not be man. That is what they would show who say of Eutyches that he did not allow the human nature in Christ to remain, *scilicet in consequenti*,<sup>2</sup> though he confesses, *scilicet in antecedenti*,<sup>3</sup> that the divine and human natures are one Christ, one Person, and two natures. In a word, as said above, he who confesses the two natures in Christ, God and man, must also ascribe the *idionomata* of both to the person, for to be God and man is to be nothing, if not to have the *idionomata* of both. Therefore, both Nestorius and Eutyches were rightly condemned because of their error in understanding Christ.

It is true, to be sure, that Eutyches had, perhaps, a greater temptation than Nestorius, for many of the human *idionomata* have been left behind by Christ, such as eating, drink-

<sup>1</sup> "The conclusion of a valid argument." Cf. above, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> "Viz., in his conclusion."

<sup>3</sup> "In his premise."

I Cor.  
15:49,  
53

ing, sleeping, sorrowing, suffering, dying, being buried, etc. He now sits at the right hand of God, and no longer eats, drinks, sleeps, sorrows, suffers, dies, to all eternity, as will happen with us also when we pass out of this life, into that, according to I Corinthians xv. These are temporal and transient *idiomata*; but the *idiomata* of the nature remain, such as having body and soul, skin and hair, blood and flesh, marrow and bones and all the members of a human nature. Therefore it must be said that this man, Christ, flesh and blood of Mary, is creator of heaven and earth, has overcome death, abolished sin, broken hell in pieces. These are all divine *idiomata*, and yet it is right and Christian to ascribe them all to the Person who is flesh and blood of Mary, because there are not two persons, but one.

Your son Peter is called a scholar, though this *idioma* is only of the soul, not of the body, and a Eutyches might juggle with the words, and say, "No! Peter is not a scholar, but his soul is." On the other hand, a Nestorius might say, "No! I did not flog your son, but only his body." That would sound as though they would make of Peter two persons, or retain only one nature for him, and yet it would not be so meant. That is ignorance and stupidity and shows that they were bad logicians. But that kind of ignorance is not rare in the world and shows itself in other matters also. People often admit something and yet deny what must logically follow from it. That is what is meant by *antedecendente concessio, negare consequens*.<sup>1</sup> There are today many great lords and scholars who confess, freely and firmly, that our doctrine of faith, which justifies without merit, by pure grace, is true; and yet they take offense when it is said that monasticism and worship of saints and the like should, therefore, be let go and be despised; though logic compels that conclusion. No man can be justified except by faith; it follows, that one cannot be justified by the monastic life. Then why hold on to it? What is the use of it?

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<sup>1</sup> "Admitting the premise and denying the conclusion."

But I shall take myself, too, by the nose and not be so ungrateful as to forget my own folly. Twenty years ago I taught, as I still do, that faith alone justifies, without works. If, at that time, however, someone had risen up and taught that monkery and nunnery ought to be called idolatry and the mass an abomination, if I had not helped burn him at the stake, I should, at least, have believed that burning at the stake served him right; and thoughtless fool that I was!—I could not see the consequence, which I ought to have admitted, viz., that if faith alone does it, monkery and the mass could not do it. What was still worse, I knew that these were doctrines and works of men, and yet I did not ascribe the same value to good works commanded by God and done in faith. In truth, I gave a fine illustration of my Nestorius and my Eutyches, though with reference to other things, when I admitted one thing and did not agree to the other thing, which followed from it. So Nestorius admits that Christ is God and man and will not agree that this God was born and died, though this follows from the first statement.

Luther's  
Folly

Moreover, Luther accuses the papists of teaching neither faith nor good works, and they, in turn, have no rest, and accuse Luther still more violently of teaching wrongly concerning the Christian faith and of forbidding good works. What, then, is the issue? Why are they not one, since they confess the same things? I shall tell you. There is a Nestorius here who has gone astray on the *idiomata*. Luther wants good works, but they are not to have glorious, divine *idiomata*, so that they make satisfaction for sin, reconcile God's wrath, and justify sinners. These *idiomata* belong to Another, Whose name is "Lamb of God, that beareth the sins of the world." Yea, verily these *idiomata* should be left to the blood and death of Christ; good works should have other *idiomata*, other merits, other rewards. This the papists do not want, but they ascribe to good works the power to make satisfaction for sins and make people righteous. Therefore they cry out that Luther teaches no good works, but forbids them. They do not see the logical consequence, however. If one teaches

John  
1:29

good works which make satisfaction for sin, it is just the same as though one taught no good works at all, for such good works are *nihil in rerum natura*,<sup>1</sup> they are nothing and nowhere, and cannot be. Therefore in the very act of teaching and confessing good works, firmly and completely, they teach no good works at all.

Nes-  
torius'  
Logic

Here you see Nestorius' logic. He admits the antecedent and denies the consequence, and thus he makes the antecedent false. If the one is true, the other must also be true in any real, logical argument. On the other hand, if the latter statement be false, the former must also be false. Good works make satisfaction for sin,—they not only admit this, but even insist upon it; but the other statement, viz., that such works are not good, nay, are nothing and not works at all,—this they condemn. And yet the latter statement follows compellingly out of the former; for good works that make satisfaction for sin are the same as no good works; just as it follows compellingly, *Qui docet id quod not est, docet nihil*, "He who teaches what is not, teaches nothing." So one may speak, too, of faith. He who teaches a faith that does not justify alone and without works, teaches no faith; for the faith that justifies with or by works, is nothing at all.

I will give a still plainer illustration. Some jurists admit that it is right for a priest to marry, but do not admit the consequence, viz., that a priest's children are heirs.<sup>2</sup> That is the same thing as saying that a priest's marriage is fornication, for if there is a marriage, the child must be an heir; if it is not an heir, there is no marriage. This is called in the schools, *negare consequens antecedentis concessi in bona consequentia*, and *destructo consequente, retinere antecedens*.<sup>3</sup> This is impossible, and those who do it are known for gross, ignorant people; but it was the failing of both Nestorius and Eutyches, as it is of many other people in other matters. It is sure that both of them were serious in

<sup>1</sup> "Not in the nature of things," i.e., as things are, there are no such works.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., legitimate.

<sup>3</sup> "Denying the conclusion of an admitted premise, in a good syllogism," and "retaining the premise when the conclusion has been destroyed."

holding that Christ is God and man in one Person, as we gather from the histories, and even from the acts of the councils, and yet they could not agree to the result, or conclusion, that the Person, Who is God and man, was crucified and made the heavens, but thought that Christ could not be crucified and man could not make the heavens.

And what shall we say of ourselves? The apostles at Jerusalem, together with many thousands of the Jews, had been justified by faith alone, i.e., by the grace of Christ; but they had their Nestorius and Eutyches sticking in them and did not see the consequence, viz., that the law of Moses did not and could not contribute anything to this, but wanted to give it the *idionata* which belong only to the Lamb of God, and said, as we have noted above,<sup>1</sup> that the Gentiles could not be saved, unless they were circumcised and kept the law of Moses. That was the same thing as denying Christ and His grace, as St. Paul says in Galatians ii, "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ has died in vain"; and in Romans xi, "If it is of grace, then it is not of works." But those at Jerusalem spoke thus: "It is, indeed, grace alone, but it must also be works alone; for without the law, no one can be saved, though a man must be saved by grace alone, without the law." In plain German, that is cutting off one's own nose,<sup>2</sup> and not understanding what one says. The schools call it, as I have said, *antecedens concedere*, and *consequens negare*; or *consequens destruere* and *antecedens affirmare*.<sup>3</sup> It is saying Yes and No at the same time about the same thing. This no one must do, unless he is utterly ignorant or a hopeless scoffer.

Gal. 2:21

Rom.  
11:6

That is what my Antinomians,<sup>4</sup> too, are doing today. They

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 188 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Sich selbs in die Backen hauen*, "chopping oneself in the cheeks."

<sup>3</sup> "Granting the premise and denying the conclusion," or "destroying the conclusion and affirming the premise."

<sup>4</sup> The party whose spokesman was Luther's old friend and follower. John Agricola of Eisleben. Through the years 1536-39, he had been uttering opinions that conflicted sharply with Luther's own. The subject of their difference was the meaning and purpose of the law; Luther held that the purpose of God's law was to lead men to knowledge of sin and so to repentance; Agricola taught that repentance was possible only through the knowledge of the goodness of God revealed in the gospel. Luther accused Agricola of abolishing the

The  
Anti-  
nomians

are preaching finely and (I can think nothing else) with real seriousness about Christ's grace, the forgiveness of sins, and the other things that can be said concerning redemption. But they flee the consequence of this, as though it were the very devil, and will not speak to the people about the Third Article,<sup>1</sup> which is sanctification, i.e., the new life in Christ. For they think that they ought not to terrify people, or disturb them, but always to preach in a comforting way about grace and the forgiveness of sins in Christ, and utterly avoid such words as these: "Listen! You want to be a Christian and yet remain an adulterer, fornicator, drunken swine, proud, covetous, a usurer, envious, revengeful, malicious!" On the contrary, they say: "Listen! Though you are an adulterer, a fornicator, a miser, or any other kind of sinner, only believe, and you will be saved and need not fear the law; Christ has fulfilled it all!"

Tell me, is that not granting the premise and denying the conclusion? Nay, it is taking away Christ and bringing Him to nought, at the same time that He is most highly preached. It is saying Yes and No to the same thing. There is no such Christ, Who has died for these sinners who, after forgiveness of sins, do not leave their sins and lead a new life. Thus they finely preach the logic of Nestorius and Eutyches, that Christ is this and is yet not this. They are fine Easter preachers, but shamefully poor Pentecost preachers, for they preach nothing *de sanctificatione et vivificatione Spiritus Sancti*, i.e., concerning sanctification by the Holy Ghost, but preach only about redemption by Christ, though Christ, Whom they extol so highly (and rightly so!) is Christ, i.e., He has purchased redemption from sin and death, in order that the Holy Ghost shall make new men of us, in place of the old Adam, so that we die unto sin and live unto righteousness, as St. Paul teaches in Romans vi, beginning and increasing this life here on earth, and completing it yonder. What Christ has earned for us is not only *gratia*, "grace," but also *donum*,

real purpose of the law and debasing the gospel. Only a few months before the present work was written, Luther had published the last of a series of writings against Agricola. See Weimar Ed., L, 461 ff.

<sup>1</sup> The third article of the Creed. Cf. Luther's Catechism.

the "gift" of the Holy Ghost, so that we might not only have forgiveness of sin, but also cease from sinning. Whoever, then, does not cease from sinning, but continues in his former wicked life, must have another Christ from the Antinomians, for the real Christ is not there, even though all the angels were to cry only "Christ! Christ!"; and he must be damned with his new Christ.

See what bad logicians we are in high matters, which are above us or in which we are not practiced, so that at one and the same time, we can believe a thing and not believe it! In lower things, however, we are very keen logicians! A farmer, however stupid he may be, understands and reckons it out at once that he who gives me a *groschen* gives me no *gulden*, for it follows as a matter of course, and he sees the logic clearly. But our Antinomians do not see that they preach Christ without the Holy Ghost and against the Holy Ghost, because they are willing to let the people continue in their old life, and yet declare them saved, though the logic of it is that a Christian should have the Holy Ghost and lead a new life, or know that he has no Christ. These asses, then, want to be better logicians than Master Philip<sup>1</sup> and Aristotle, to say nothing of Luther. The pope alone must feel them; they fly too high for me. So, then, the logic of Nestorius and Eutyches is a common plague, especially in matters of Holy Scripture; in other matters it knows how to conduct itself. To be sure, it gives the jurists and rulers trouble enough in subtle cases, where they sometimes hear Yes and No at once and have difficulty in telling them apart.

Now if Eutyches or Nestorius, after being instructed by the bishops remained stiff and proud in his opinion,—though I cannot determine this, according to the histories,—then they were justly condemned, not only as heretics, but as gross fools. But if they did not stand stiffly on their own opinions (and the acts of the councils report that Eutyches, especially, did not) and the bishops condemned them without giving kindly instruction to the erring ones, according to Paul's teaching, in Galatians vi,—even then they judged the case aright, though they will have to answer to the true

Was  
Eutyches  
Rightly  
Treated?

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<sup>1</sup> Melancthon.

Judge for their pride and hasty action (for these councils have attained great reputation and there were more than six hundred and thirty bishops at this one).

I remember Master John Wesel,<sup>1</sup> who was preacher at Mainz and formerly ruled the University of Erfurt with his books, from which I myself got my Master's degree there,—how he was condemned by the abandoned, proud murderers, known as "inquisitors (I ought to say 'inventors') of heresy," Dominicans, because he would not say "I believe that there is a God," but "I know that there is a God"; for all the schools held that the existence of God is known of itself, as St. Paul also says in Romans i. How the barefoot murderers at Eisenach dealt with John Hilten is told in the Apology.<sup>2</sup>

Rom.  
1:19

Suppose that, without any warning, there were to come to you and me an honorable man, who could make the case sound strange with the uncouthness of his words, and he were to say: "I want to tell you! A new prophet has arisen who teaches that if a man is entirely holy, he cannot only do miracles, but create heaven and earth, and all that is in them, and angels, making them out of nothing, as some of the scholastic doctors have argued in discussing Book IV of the Sentences.<sup>3</sup> What is still worse, he says that the old God is dead, etc." Here you and I would say: "This must be the devil and his dam. The Scripture says, 'I am God, and change not'; and Paul says, *Qui solus immortalitatem habet*. 'Who alone hath immortality.' What is the use of many words? God lives alone and is Himself life." Then he would begin: "That is what you yourself teach. You say that Christ is a man, entirely holy,

Mal. 3:6  
1 Tim.  
6:16

<sup>1</sup> Johann von Wesel (d. 1479). He taught at Erfurt 1445-57. In 1461 he became professor of theology at Basel; in 1463, cathedral preacher at Worms. The criticisms of the Church, expressed in his sermons, caused his deposition in 1477. He was then called to a position as preacher in Mainz, but was almost immediately accused of heresy, and after a trial before a commission which included the famous Dominican inquisitors Elten and Sprenger, was condemned to life-imprisonment in a monastery. Because of his vigorous attacks on indulgences and his clear assertion of the sole authority of Scripture, he is usually classed among the precursors of Luther. The fullest account of his life and teaching in ULLMANN, *Reformatoren vorder Ref.*,<sup>2</sup> (1866), I. 149 ff.; Eng. trans., I. 160 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XXVII, (JACOBS, *Book of Concord*, 280 f.) Cf. *Realencyk.* 8; 78-80.

<sup>3</sup> The Sentences of Peter Lombard.



who made heaven and earth, and that He is also true God, Who died for you on the Cross." See how we have, all unwittingly, become blasphemous Nestorians and Eutycheses by confessing that Christ, one Person, has died for us and has created heaven and earth, though we have just said that it must be the devil and his dam who says that a man created heaven and earth and that God died; and yet logical consistency compels us to say this, because we believe that Christ is God and man in one Person. There you see how the *idionata* get thoughtless people all mixed up and lead them astray unwittingly. In such a case we ought to come along with gentle instruction, and not proudly condemn those who have erred. God grant that I may not be telling the truth, but I fear that at the Last Day some heretics will be judges and some of the bishops who have judged them will be condemned. "God is wonderful and incomprehensible in His judgments" though we know that "He is gracious to the humble and resisteth the proud"; and especially in the ranks of those who have a place in the councils and the Church, nothing should be done from *zelo*, i.e., envy and pride. God cannot suffer it.

Rom.  
11:33  
1 Pet.  
5:5

These are my ideas about Eutyches. If I have not hit the mark, I have missed it; and it is their fault. Why did they not treat the subject better and describe it more diligently so that it could be understood more clearly? And what would we do if the acts of this council were lost? The Christian faith would not sink. More things and better things than the acts of this council have been lost. St. Augustine himself complains that he finds almost nothing in the writings of his predecessors that help him against Pelagius, and yet such a great matter must have been much discussed. I have formed my ideas in accordance with the words of the Roman bishop Leo who says<sup>1</sup> that the heresies of Eutyches and Nestorius are opposite and contradictory of one another. Now it is certain from the *Tripartita*, that Nestorius confessed, even violently, that Christ is true God and man and was no Arian; for the Arians held that Christ is simply

<sup>1</sup> Leo I, Ep. CLXV, c. 2. Cf. Ep. CXXIV. (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, p. 91.

not God, and he drove them out and persecuted them even to the point of murder and slaughter. But his heresy lay in this, that the *idiomata* confused him and led him astray so that he could not see how God could be born of a woman and crucified. Therefore, Eutyches' opposite heresy must have been that he did, indeed, hold Christ for God and man but would not give the *idiomata* of the divine nature to the man, just as Nestorius would not ascribe the *idiomata* of the human nature to God, in the one Person of Christ. This is what is meant by saying that the two are opposite and contradictory.

If it was his intention simply to deny the human nature in Christ, then his heresy is not the opposite of that of Nestorius, but he must have been raving mad to think that in Christ deity and humanity were united and yet that only one nature, the divine, remained. That would have been opposed not only to Nestorius but to all believers and unbelievers, to all heretics and true Christians, to all heathen and all men; for no man ever taught a thing like that. Nevertheless they describe these matters in such a way as to testify that Eutyches confessed that in Christ deity and humanity were united in one Person, and yet they say the other thing also,<sup>1</sup> as though they intended that nobody should understand it; therefore we will not understand it. Why should we, when we have a better understanding of it already. Eutyches said in the council that he had not spoken words like those of which they accused him when he was said to have denied the human nature. From this one can mark that he was in error and did not wish to deny the human nature in Christ. But if I were Doctor Luther, I would like to hear from these papal writers how they themselves could believe their own words, when they said that Nestorius held that there were two persons in Christ and yet only one person, and that Eutyches held that there were two natures in Christ and yet only one nature. I think, indeed, that they, too, are Nestorian and Eutychian logicians; I say nothing about their theology; perhaps they are compelled to be antilogicians.

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<sup>1</sup> Viz., that Christ had only one nature.

To come back to the council! We find that here, too, this council established no new article of faith, and so cannot be used as a proof that councils have power to load new articles of faith upon the Church. For this article is far more abundantly and mightily grounded in Scripture, as in John v, "The Father hath given power to the Son to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man." Here, according to Eutyches' opinion, Christ would have had to say, "Because he is the Son of God." For to execute judgment is an *idioma* of the divine nature and not of the human nature; but Christ ascribes it to His human nature, the Son of man, i.e., the son of the Virgin Mary. In Matthew xxii, also, Christ asks the Pharisees how it agrees that David calls Christ "Lord," though He is to be his son and his seed. "If He is David's son, or seed, how, then, does He sit at the right hand of God?" Here Eutyches would have had to say that not David's seed, but only God's son can sit at the right hand of God. Nevertheless he confesses that David's son and God's Son are one person; but where the person sits, there sits God's Son and David's. Eutyches did not see this consequence, and therefore had to let men think that he held Christ to be not a man, but only a divine person and nature, though this was not what he meant.

In a word, all the prophets and all the Scriptures which ascribe to Christ, or Messiah, an everlasting kingdom and redemption from sin, death, and hell are all against Eutyches, for they all say that "the seed of the woman shall trample on the head of the serpent," (Genesis iii), that is, shall overcome sin, death, devil, hell; and these are *idiotata* of divine nature, not of the woman's seed. And all the world is to be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Genesis xxii), that is, sin, death, hell, the curse of God, are to be taken away, and these, too, are *idiotata* not of Abraham's seed, but of divine nature. Later on, the glorious, mighty prophecies of David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets say of David's seed that he shall establish eternal righteousness, that is, abolish sin, death, and hell; these are *idiotata* of divine majesty and nature, and yet they are

The  
Council  
Made  
No New  
Articles

John  
5:27

Matt.  
22:43

Gen. 3:15

Gen.  
22:18

Jer.  
23:5

ascribed, throughout the Scriptures, to the son of David, Christ, the son of the Virgin Mary. Even though I have not this council or do not understand it aright, nevertheless, I have these Scriptures and understand them aright, and it is the duty of the council to hold what they teach; and for me that is more certain than all councils.

Anyone who will may read further into the story of this council; I have read myself into a bad humor with it. There is in it so much quarreling and disturbance and disorder that I must almost believe the great Nazianzen,<sup>1</sup> the teacher of St. Jerome, who lived before this time<sup>2</sup> and saw better councils and fathers, and yet says, "To tell the truth, one ought to flee all the councils of bishops, for I have never seen any good results from the councils, not even the abolition of evil, but only ambition, disputes over precedence, etc."<sup>3</sup> I wonder how it happens that they have not long since made him out the worst of heretics because of these words. But what he says is true. In the councils the bishops are ambitious, proud, quarrelsome, and violent; and you will find that in this council, though it is not necessary, to be sure, that all who teach correctly or uphold correct doctrine shall be holy men. Balaam was a true prophet and Judas was a true apostle and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat and teach correctly. We, too, therefore, must have for our faith something more and something more certain than the councils. That something more and more certain is the Holy Scriptures.

That he speaks the truth when he says that he has seen no good result of the councils, the histories plainly teach us. For before the Nicene Council the Arian heresy was a jest compared with the misery that it created after the council, as was said above. So it went also with the other councils, as in the cases of Macedonius and Nestorius, for the party that was condemned held together all the more firmly, wanted to justify itself and be uncondemned, and fanned the flame more violently than before against the councils, which did

Deut.  
24:17  
Matt.  
10:4

Matt.  
23:2

The  
Council  
of Con-  
stance

<sup>1</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, Patriarch of Constantinople at the time of the Second General Council, 381.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. Before the Council of Chalcedon.

<sup>3</sup> Ep. IV, to Procopius. Cf. Weimar Ed. L, 604, note a.

not rightly understand them. So it happened to us Germans at the Council of Constance. The pope was made subject to the council and was deposed by it and his tyranny and simony were severely condemned. But since that time the pope is possessed with seven worse devils and his tyranny and simony have just gotten a good start. He devours and robs and steals all the endowed places, the monastic houses and the churches; he sells indulgences, grace, law, God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost; he betrays, ruins, and disturbs emperor and kings; he makes war, sheds blood, and kills bodies and souls, so that one must comprehend what god it is who keeps house at Rome. This is the reward we Germans have for deposing and reforming the popes at the Council of Constance. I think, indeed, that this was the right end for this council. Depose more popes next time, and reform them, if seven devils are not enough for them, so that there may be seventy-seven legions of them to fight against you; if, indeed, there is any room there for more devils to get into them and they are not already filled up with devils. This was the reformation of the Council of Constance.

We now have the four chief councils and the causes for which they were held. The first, at Nicæa, defended the deity of Christ against Arius; the second, at Constantinople, defended the deity of the Holy Ghost against Macedonius; the third, at Ephesus, defended the one Person of Christ against Nestorius; the fourth, at Chalcedon, defended the two natures in Christ against Eutyches:—but they did not thereby establish any new article of faith. For these four articles are established far more abundantly and powerfully in St. John's Gospel alone, even though the other evangelists and St. Paul and St. Peter had written nothing about them, though all these, together with the prophets, teach them and testify mightily to them. These four councils the bishops of Rome, according to their decree, hold to be like the four evangelists, as though these matters, together with all articles of faith, did not stand far more richly in the Gospels and as though the councils had not taken them from

A Summary

the Gospels; so finely do those asses of bishops understand what the Gospels and the councils are! And if these four chief councils do not intend to make or establish anything new in the way of articles of faith, and cannot do so, as they themselves confess, how much less can such power be ascribed to the other councils, which must be held of smaller account, if these four are to be called the chief councils.

This is the way in which we are to understand all other councils also, whether large or small, even though there were many thousands of them. They set up nothing new, either in faith or good works, but rather, as the highest judges, and greatest bishops under Christ, they defend the ancient faith and the ancient good works, though, to be sure, they do deal besides with temporal, transient, changing things, to meet the need of their own times. This, however, has to be done, even outside the councils, in the parishes and schools. But if they do establish anything new in faith or good works, be assured that the Holy Spirit is not there, but the unholy spirit with his angels. For they can do this only without the Holy Scriptures and outside of them, nay, contrary to the Holy Scriptures, as Christ says, "He that is not with me is against me." The Holy Ghost can neither know nor do anything more than St. Paul, when he says, in I Corinthians ii, "I know nothing save Jesus Christ, the crucified," and the Holy Ghost is not given us in order to put anything into our minds or teach us anything apart from Christ, but he is to teach us and call to our remembrance all that is in Christ, in whom lie hidden all treasures of wisdom and understanding. He is to make Him clear to us, as Christ says, and not praise up our reason or opinion, or make it an idol.

Therefore, such councils apart from the Scriptures are councils of Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod, as the apostles say in Acts 4:26, *Convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum*, "They take counsel, or hold councils, against God and His Christ"; and all the evangelists say that the high-priests and Pharisees took counsel, or assembled councils, how they might kill Christ, as David had prophesied in

Matt.  
12:30

I Cor.  
2:2

John  
14:26

Col. 2:3

John  
16:19

Acts 4:26

Ps. 2:2  
Matt.  
26:4

Mark  
14:1

Luke  
22:2

Psalm ii, saying that they would take counsel against God and His Anointed and call Christ's preaching "bands" and "cords," and break them asunder and cast them from them. This is what most of the pope's councils have been. In them he sets himself up in Christ's stead as head of the Church, puts the Holy Scriptures beneath him and rends them asunder, as his decrees show. Thus at Constance he condemned both kinds in the sacrament<sup>1</sup> and before that he tore marriage asunder, forbade it and condemned it, and actually crucified and buried the Christ. Ps. 2:2f.

And now we come to the main question because of which I am writing this book. What is a council, or what is its work? If it is not to set up new articles of faith, then all the world has heretofore been wretchedly deceived, for it knows nothing else and holds nothing else except that what a council decides is an article of faith, or at least a work necessary to salvation, so that he who does not keep the council's decree can never be saved, because he is disobedient to the Holy Ghost, the council's Master. Ah, well! I think that my conscience is clear, and no council, as I said above, has power to establish new articles of faith, because the four chief councils did not do so. Therefore I shall here speak my opinion and answer the main question as follows. What a Council Can Do

First. A council has no power to establish new articles of faith, despite the fact that the Holy Ghost is in it; for even the Apostolic Council at Jerusalem (Acts xvi) established nothing new in the way of faith, but only St. Peter's conclusion, viz., that all their ancestors had believed this article.<sup>2</sup> A man must be saved without the law, only through the grace of Christ. Acts 15:11

Second. A council has the power, and is bound, to suppress and condemn new articles of faith according to Holy Scripture and the ancient faith as the Council of Nicæa condemned the new article of Arius, that of Con-

<sup>1</sup> See note, WEIMAR ED. XXXIX, 9ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 150ff.

stantinople the new article of Macedonius, that of Ephesus the new article of Nestorius, that of Chalcedon the new article of Eutyches.

**Third.** A council has no power to command new good works. Nor can it do so, for all good works are already abundantly commanded in Holy Scripture. What more good works can one imagine than those which the Holy Ghost has taught in the Scriptures, such as humility, patience, gentleness, mercy, faithfulness, faith, kindness, peace, obedience, self-control, chastity, giving, serving, etc., in a word, love? What good work can one imagine that is not included in the command of love? If it is outside of love, what kind of a good work is it? For love, according to St. Paul's teaching, is the fulfillment of all commandments, as Christ Himself also says in Matthew v.

Gal. 5:22  
Gal. 5:14  
Matt. 5:44

**Fourth.** A council has the power, and is bound, to condemn wicked works that are contrary to love, according to the Scriptures and the ancient way of the Church, and to rebuke<sup>1</sup> the individuals who are guilty of them, as the decree of the Nicene Council rebukes the ambition of other vices of the bishops and deacons.

**Wicked Works** In this connection we ought to speak of two kinds of wicked works. Some of them, such as avarice, murder, adultery, ambition, and the like, are openly wicked. These we find condemned by the councils, as they are also condemned, without the councils, in Holy Scripture and are punished by the temporal law. But beside these there are other new good works, which are not called wicked, but are beautifully wicked,<sup>2</sup> fine vices, holy idolatries, invented by the special saints or even the mad saints; in a word, they are a white devil, a bright Satan. These wicked works (I should rather say, these new good works!) the councils ought to condemn to the uttermost and as sharply as possible, for they are perilous to the Christian faith and are an offense to the Christian life, and cause both to be deformed or despised.

So when a weak Christian sees or hears a holy hermit

<sup>1</sup> Or "punish."

<sup>2</sup> Schön böse, i.e. wicked in spite of a fine appearance.



or monk who leads a life of peculiar strictness beyond the old, ordinary Christian way, he stumbles, and thinks that, compared with this new saint, the life of all the old Christians is nothing, or is entirely worldly and perilous. That is the source of this abomination that has made its way into all the world: a Christian burgher or peasant who has a true, pure Christian faith toward Christ and practices the true, old, good works, such as humility, patience, mildness, chastity, love, and faithfulness to his neighbor, and diligence and care in his work, office, calling, and station,—such a man is a real old saint and Christian; but he must stink and be nothing at all compared with the new saint who, underneath his special dress, food, fasting, bed, outward conduct, and the like new works, is a proud, ambitious, wrathful, impatient, hateful, lustful, presumptuous, false Christian. Such people St. Paul himself calls proud and self-willed saints, who choose for themselves a new kind of life and a new way of serving God (a way that God has not commanded!) over and above the Christian Church's old, true, common way of living and serving God, which God has ordained and commanded.

II Tim.  
3:2

The elect may be preserved amid these new and offensive works, but they will have to take off this new skin and be saved in the old Christian skin. This is what happened to St. Anthony<sup>1</sup> when he had to learn that a shoemaker or tanner in Alexandria was a better Christian than he with his monkery, and he confessed, also, that he had not progressed as far as that shoemaker. So it was, too, with the great saint, John, *primus eremita*,<sup>2</sup> who prophesied for the Emperor Theodosius and was highly praised by St. Augustine. When the people, among them St. Jerome, admired the severity of his life, he gave this answer:—"Why do you look for anything special among us? Have you not something better in your parish-churches, where the Scriptures

Monasticism  
Not a  
Good  
Work

<sup>1</sup> The founder of monasticism in Egypt (d. 356). Luther had the story from the *Vitae patrum*, which passed as the work of Jerome, but is now generally ascribed to Rufinus. Cf. SCHAEFER, pp. 159 ff., 425.

<sup>2</sup> "The first hermit." He is usually known simply as John the hermit. Luther found this story also in the *Vitae patrum*. The praise of Augustine is found in his tract, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* (Migne, 40, 607 f.)

and the examples of prophets and apostles are preached to you?" That is taking off the cowl and subjecting oneself to Holy Scripture and praising only the common Christian way of life. Paphnutius<sup>1</sup> also had to learn that he was on a level with a fiddler who had been a murderer, and with two wives who had lain with their husbands that very night, and had to say, "One must despise no rank in life." The same thing happened to St. Bernard,<sup>2</sup> to Bonaventura, and doubtless to many other good men; when they had to feel at last that their new holiness and monkery could not stand against sin and death, then they crept to the cross and were saved in the old Christian faith, without their new holiness, as the words of St. Bernard testify in many places.

In none of the councils, especially the four chief ones, do we find these new good works condemned, except that one or two small councils, especially that of twenty bishops at Gangra (the proceedings of which have recently been printed)<sup>3</sup> have done something in the matter; but they have rather allowed this new holiness to get the upper hand until the Christian Church is scarcely recognizable any longer. They have acted like lazy gardeners who let the suckers get such headway that the old, true tree has to suffer, or be ruined. Even as early as the time of St. Anthony monkery had made such headway that in the days of the fourth council there was already an abbey near Constantinople of which Eutyches was abbot, though the monasteries were not the imperial castles of stone that they afterwards became. For they call him archimandrite, and *mandre* is said to mean a simple fence or hedge such as is made of bushes and plants and shoots to keep in cattle or as a pen for sheep; and Eutyches, as the head of it, lived, with his followers, inside such a hedge, and led a separated life. From this one can under-

<sup>1</sup> The same referred to above as a member of the Nicene Council. This story is another from the *Vitae patrum*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Weimar Ed., 47, 85, 585, 598.

<sup>3</sup> The little Synod of Gangra, in Paphlagonia, held in 343, adopted a series of canons directed against overemphasis of the ascetic life. In 1530 John Kymaeus, pastor at Homberg, used these canons in an attack upon the Anabaptists. The book was published in 1537 with a preface by Luther. (See Weimar Ed. I, 45 ff.). The canons to which Luther here refers (especially Canon IX) are noted in Weimar Ed. I, 609, note c.

stand what a monastery was when as yet there was no monastery enclosed with walls.

But just as happens in a garden where the suckers grow far higher than the true, fruit-bearing shoots, so it goes also in the garden of the Church; these new saints, who grow out at the side and yet want to be Christians and live from the sap of the tree, increase more mightily than the true, old saints of the Christian faith and life. And now that I have come to that, I must tell what I have noticed in the histories. St. Bernard was an abbot for thirty-six years, and in those years founded one hundred and sixty houses of his order,<sup>1</sup> and everyone knows what kind of monasteries the Cistercians have; they may have been smaller, perhaps, at that time, but now they are regular princedoms. I will say still more. At that time, i.e., in the reigns of Emperors Henry III, IV, and V, within a period of twenty years, many princely monastic orders sprang up,—Grandiomontensians,<sup>2</sup> Reformed Regular Canons,<sup>3</sup> Carthusians<sup>4</sup> and Cistercians.<sup>5</sup> And what has come of it in the four hundred years since then? I verily believe that one might say it has rained and snowed monks, and it would be no wonder if there were no town or village left where there was not a monastic house or two, or at least a terminary or stationary.<sup>6</sup> The histories blame Emperor Valentinian because he used monks in war.<sup>7</sup> To be sure! The idle people were getting too many! We read also of some of the kings of France that they had to forbid men, especially serfs, to become monks, for they sought freedom under the cowl and everybody was running into the monasteries.

The world wants to be cheated. If you want to catch many robins or other birds, you must put an owl on the trap or lime-rod and you will get them. So when the devil wants

<sup>1</sup> For the source of this statement see SCHAEFER, *op. cit.*, 104; Weimar Ed., L. 610, note b.

<sup>2</sup> The order of Grammont, founded 1073.

<sup>3</sup> The Augustinian Canons, founded after 1059.

<sup>4</sup> Founded by Bruno of Cologne in 1084.

<sup>5</sup> Founded 1098.

<sup>6</sup> Names given to monastic beggars. Cf. Vol. II, p. 135, n.2.

<sup>7</sup> Luther confuses Valentinian and his colleague Valens. It was Valens who compelled Egyptian monks to enter the army. He also compelled monks who had withdrawn from the world to escape civic burdens to return and assume them. Cf. Realencyk. 20, 392.

Matt.  
6:16

to catch Christians, he has to set up a monk's cowl or, as Christ calls it, a sour, hypocritical face; then we wonder more at these owls than at the true sufferings, blood, wounds, death, and resurrection, endured because of our sin, which we see and hear in Christ our Lord. Thus we fall, in a crowd and with all our might, away from the Christian faith and upon the new holiness, that is, we fall into the snares and traps of the devil. We must always have something new. Christ's death and resurrection are old, and so are faith and love; they are common and therefore can have no more value, but we must have new things to tickle our ears, as St. Paul says. It serves us right, since our ears itch so that we can no longer endure the old, real truth, *ut accervimus*,<sup>1</sup> that we load upon ourselves great heaps of new doctrines, as has happened and will continue to happen. The later councils, especially the papal councils (for they were afterwards almost all papal) not only left these new good works uncondemned, but exalted them high above the old good works throughout the world, so that the pope canonized, or exalted, many saints from the monastic orders.

II Tim.  
4:3

At first it had, indeed, a fine appearance, but at last there came out of it a horrible abomination, as everyone added to it from day to day. St. Francis' beginning looked fine, but the thing has now become so raw that they even put cowls on the dead, so that the dead may be saved in them. Is that not a terrible thing? That is the way it is when one begins to fall away from Christ; when one has started to fall, he cannot stop. What happened in our own time in the Netherlands? Madame Margaret<sup>2</sup> commanded that after her death she should be made a nun. It was done. They dressed her in a nun's garb, sat her at a table, offered her food and drink, and treated her as a princess is treated at table. Thus she did penance for her sin and became a holy nun. But when this had lasted some days, the pious Emperor Charles heard of it and had it stopped. If he had not done so, I believe that this example would have flooded the whole

<sup>1</sup> "That we heap up"; a reference to II Tim. 4:3.

<sup>2</sup> Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan order, died 1226.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret of Austria, aunt of Charles V and regent of the Netherlands, d. 1530.

world. This is what the new holiness does and must do because it wants to improve on the true, old Christian holiness, which does not play the fool in this manner, but abides and constantly practices faith, love, humility, self-control, patience, etc., so that we see in it nothing abominable, but only lovely, gracious, quiet, sober, useful examples, pleasing to God and man. But the new holiness makes a great uproar with peculiar, new kinds of conduct so as to entice light souls to itself; it makes great pretensions, but there is nothing back of them, as St. Peter says.

II Pet.  
2:14ff.

Again, Gerson<sup>1</sup> says of the Carthusians that they do right when they hold so stiffly to their rule as to eat no meat, even though they have to die for lack of it. Now in a case of this kind, if a godly physician observes that the sick man would be helped by a chicken-stew or a bit of meat, and not otherwise, they do not follow the physician, but the sick man must sooner die. Here I rather praise St. Augustine, who puts it into his rule that the physician's advice is to be asked, and says, "They are not all of equal ability, and therefore are not all to be held alike."<sup>2</sup> That is right fine *epieikeia*<sup>3</sup> and it does not compel them to remain monks forever, for the monastery was no prison, but a voluntary association of some priests.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Staupitz once told me that he had heard the bishop of Worms, who was a Dahlberg,<sup>5</sup> say that if St. Augustine had written nothing but his rule, we should have to say that he was an able and wise man. That is true. For he would have utterly condemned these Carthusians as murderers and their monasteries as veritable places of death, as in truth they are. At Erfurt I myself saw in the Carthusian monastery a sick man walking with a crutch. He was still a young man. When I asked him whether they did not relieve him of duty in the choir and the watch, he said sadly, "I must go on."

It has served us right, however, God sent us His Son to be

<sup>1</sup> John Gerson, professor at Paris and cardinal (d. 1429). He wrote a tract on this special subject (*De non esu carniū*).

<sup>2</sup> Migne, 32, 1383.

<sup>3</sup> "Mildness," or "moderation." Cf. II Cor. 10:1.

<sup>4</sup> Augustine organized his clergy into a monastic community.

<sup>5</sup> Johann von Dahlberg, bishop of Worms 1482-1503.

<sup>6</sup> *Ich mus fort*. Here used in the sense of "I must die."

teacher and saviour; not satisfied with that, He himself preaches from His high throne in heaven and says, *H u n c a u d i t e*, "Hear ye Him." With the apostles, we ought to fall down and think that we heard nothing else in all the world; but we allow the Father and the Son to preach in vain and go on and invent our own preaching. Therefore it goes as *Psalm lxxxi* says, "My people hearken not to my voice:—so I let them go after the imagination of their heart." Thence come such fine *ethelothreskeiai* and *apheidiai* (*Colossians ii*), "Self-chosen spirituality and mercilessness to our own bodies," so that we destroy our own lives, though God has commanded that we are to care for the body, and not to kill it. Do you not think that if according to St. Augustine's rule and St. Paul's doctrine they had let the physicians advise them about the bodies of the religious, especially women, it would have helped many a fine person, who must otherwise have gone mad or died, as experience taught us? But this has been the time of wrath, in which this new and mad holiness has had to reign, as a punishment on the world.

Matt.  
17:5

Ps. 81:  
11f.

Rom.  
13:14

*Fifth.* A council has no power to impose upon Christians new ceremonies,—such as feast-days, festivals, food, drink, garb,—that are to be observed on pain of mortal sin or at peril of conscience. If they do this, there stands St. Augustine to *Januarius*, and says, *Hoc genus liberas habet observationes*,<sup>2</sup> and Christ appointed few ceremonies. Since a council has no power to impose them, we have power to omit them; nay, St. Paul forbids us to keep them, in *Colossians ii* saying, "Let not your conscience be troubled over a part of days and fasts, food or drink, etc."<sup>3</sup>

Col. 2:16

*Sixth.* A council has the power, and is bound, to condemn such ceremonies according to the Scriptures, for they are unchristian and set up a new idolatry, or service of God that God has not commanded, but forbidden.

*Seventh.* A council has no power to interfere in

<sup>1</sup> "Self-imposed devotions and rigorous discipline," Moffatt.

<sup>2</sup> "Observance of things of this kind is free."

<sup>3</sup> Luther's rendering of this text follows the Vulgate.

worldly law and government, for St. Paul says, "He who will serve God in spiritual strife must cast off worldly affairs." II 1  
27

**Eighth.** A council has the power, and is bound, to condemn attempts of this kind and new laws, according to the Scriptures, that is, to cast the pope's decretals into the fire.

**Ninth.** A council has no power to make statutes or decrees that seek nothing else than tyranny, that is, statutes which give the bishops authority and power to command what they will and make everybody tremble and obey. On the contrary, it has the power, and is bound, to condemn such things according to Holy Scripture, I Peter v, "Ye shall not lord it over the people"; and Christ says *Vos non sic*,<sup>1</sup> "He that would be highest, let him be your servant." I Pe  
5:  
Luke  
22

**Tenth.** A council has power to appoint some ceremonies, provided, first, that they do not strengthen the bishops' tyranny! second, that they are needful and profitable to the people and provide a fine and orderly discipline and way of life. Thus it is needful to have some days and also some places for people to assemble; likewise definite hours for preaching, distributing the sacraments, and for praying, singing, and praising and thanking God. So St. Paul says, in I Corinthians xiv, "Let all things be done in order and decently." With such measures the bishops' tyranny is not sought, but the need, the profit, and the order of the people. In short, we must have such things, and cannot do without them, if the Church is to abide. I C  
14

Yet if anyone from necessity, illness, hindrance, or whatever it may be, can sometimes not keep these rules, it is not a sin. It is all for his benefit, not for that of the bishop and if he is a Christian, he will not seek his own harm. What difference does it make to God if a man does not will to be in such an assembly? Every man will find that out for himself. In a word, if a man is a Christian he is not bound by such ordinances; he will keep them rather than break them, if he can be unhindered. Therefore, no law can be made

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<sup>1</sup> "Ye shall not be so."

for him about such matters; he would be glad to do more than such a law would demand. But if a man haughtily and proudly and wantonly despises them, let him go; for such a man will despise higher laws, God's laws or man's.

What Is  
Left for  
a Coun-  
cil to Do?

Perhaps you might say here, "What will you finally make of the councils if you clip their powers so close? In this way a pastor, or even a school-teacher (to say nothing of parents!) would have more power over the Church than a council." I reply: Do you think, then, that the offices of pastor and school-teacher are so small that they might not be compared with the councils? If there were no pastors or bishops, where would a council be gathered from? If there were no schools, where would we get pastors? I speak of school-teachers who not only teach children and young people the arts, but train them in Christian doctrine and faithfully impress it upon them, and of such pastors as teach God's Word faithfully and purely. I can easily show that the poor, insignificant pastor at Hippo, St. Augustine taught more than all the councils (to say nothing of the most holy popes at Rome, whom I fear to mention!) I will go even farther and say that more is given us in the Children's Creed<sup>1</sup> than in all the councils, and the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments teach more than all the councils teach; and not only do they teach, but they guard against the preaching of anything new that is contrary to the old doctrine. God help me, how the papists will tear these words out of their connection, shout them to bits, torture them to death, and prove that they are self-contradictory, but meanwhile they will let the reasons for my saying them remain; for they are pious and honorable people, who can do nothing but calumniate and lie, and I really ought to be afraid of them; but then God would not forgive me. I cannot do it and must let them go on slandering and lying.

But now let you and me talk about this thing. What can a council do, or what is its value? Listen to their own words. *Anathematizamus*, that is their office; "We condemn!" Indeed, they speak far more humbly and say,

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<sup>1</sup> The Apostles' Creed.



not, "We condemn," but *Anathematizate ecclesia*, "The holy Christian Church condemns." The council's condemnation would not frighten me, but the holy Church's condemnation would slay me in an instant because of the Man who says, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." This Man's condemnation is not to be endured! But the councils, in citing the holy Christian Church as the true supreme Judge on earth, confess that they are not arbitrary judges, but that the judge is the Church, which preaches, believes, and confesses the Holy Scriptures, as we shall hear. A thief or murderer could enslave the judge, if he were only an individual man, but the law and the land are united in the judge and he is their servant; of these the criminal must be afraid.

Matt.  
28:4

A council, then, is nothing else than a consistory or court<sup>1</sup> in which the judges, after hearing the parties, give their verdict, but with proper humility, saying, "According to the law our office is *anathematizare*, 'to condemn'; not, however, according to our own idea or will, or to newly invented law, but according to the old law, which is recognized as law throughout the empire." Thus a council condemns even a heretic, not according to its own opinion, but according to the imperial law, i.e., according to the Holy Scriptures, which they confess to be the law of the holy Church. This law, empire, and judge is verily to be feared on peril of eternal damnation, for the law is God's Word, the empire is God's Church, and the judge is the officer, or servant, of both.

The  
Council  
a Court

The servant, or judge, of this empire is not, however, the council alone, but every pastor and school-master. Moreover a council cannot exercise its judicial office everlastingly and without interruption, for the bishops cannot always remain gathered together, but can only come together in certain times of need and anathematize, or be judges. So, if an Arius in Alexandria grows too strong for his pastor or bishop attaches the people to him, and draws in other pastors and people, even from the country, so that the pastor at

<sup>1</sup> Consistorium, Hofegericht, Camergericht oder dergleichen. The terms are borrowed from the Roman Law, and were names for courts existing in Germany in Luther's time.

Alexandria gets the worst of it and in his judicial office can no longer defend the law of the empire, that is, the true Christian faith;—in such a need and at such a time, the other pastors and bishops ought to run with all their might to the help of the pastor of Alexandria against Arius, defend the true Christian faith, and condemn Arius in order to save others, so that such a miserable state of affairs may not get the upper hand entirely. If the pastors were unable to come, the good Emperor Constantine ought to contribute his power, and help the bishops together. It is just as when a fire breaks out; if the man who lives in the house cannot subdue it, all the neighbors ought to run together and help put it out; and if they do not run together, the government must help, and command that they must run together, and anathematize or condemn the fire, so that the other houses may be saved.<sup>1</sup>

The  
Coun-  
cils and  
the  
Diets

The council, therefore, is the great servant, or judge, for this empire and its law; but when the time of need is past, it has completed its duty. So, in temporal government, the high, great judges have to take hold, when the lower, smaller courts would be too weak to resist the evil, until the matter comes, at last, to the highest, greatest court, the diet, which cannot be perpetual, but breaks up again, when the necessity has been met, and commits the case to the lower courts again. At the diets, however, it happens now and then that new laws and more laws must be made and old ones must be altered and amended or even abolished, and one cannot speak perpetually of a perpetual law; for this is a temporal government, which rules over temporal things that alter and change, and therefore the laws that are made for these temporal things must also change. If the thing for which the law is made is no longer there, then the law is nothing. Thus the city of Rome no longer has the ranks and the organization that it once had, and therefore the laws that were made for these things are dead and no longer in force. Transient things have transient laws.

But in the empire of the Church the rule is, "God's Word

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Vol. II, p. 78.

abideth forever." Men must judge according to it and not make new or other words of God, or establish new or other articles of faith. Therefore pastors and school-masters are the lowly, but daily, permanent, perpetual judges who incessantly anathematize, that is, guard against the devil and his raging. A council, since it is a great judge, must make old and great rascals good, or kill them, but it cannot produce any others; a pastor and a school-master have to do with small, young rascals, and are constantly producing new people to be bishops and, if necessary, to form councils. A council chops the great limbs off the trees or roots the evil trees out altogether; but a pastor and a school-master produce young trees and saplings in the garden. They have a precious office and work and are the Church's finest jewels; they preserve the Church. Therefore, all lords should do their part to see that pastors and schools are preserved; for if we cannot have councils, the parishes and schools, small though they are, are perpetual and useful councils.

One sees how highly the ancient emperors prized the parishes and schools by the richness of the endowments which they gave them. That these were originally schools is shown by the names, provost, dean, *scolasticus*, cantor, canons, vicars, custodians, etc.<sup>1</sup> But what has come out of them? Lord God! Would that they still were willing to do something, remain what they were, keep what they had, were princes and lords, but introduced hours of study again and compelled the canons, vicars, and choir-pupils to listen to lectures on Holy Scripture, so that they might again have something of the form of schools in order that we could have pastors and bishops, and they might be helping to rule the Church! O Lord God! What immeasurable good they could do the Church! And God would permit them to have their wealth and power, if they were to amend their shameful life! But our sighs and complaints are vain. They neither hear nor see; they let the parishes be laid waste and the people, without God's Word, become rough and wild. I have heard from people whom I must believe that

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Smalcald Articles*, Pt. II, Art. III. *JACOBS, Book of Concord*, 317 f.

in many dioceses there are two, three, and four hundred good parishes vacant.<sup>1</sup> Is not that a terrible, horrible thing among Christians? May God in heaven have mercy on us and hear our wretched sighings and laments! Amen.

The  
Duty of  
Coun-  
cils

To finish, at last, this matter of the councils, I hold that everyone can get from what has been said, an understanding of what a council is, and what its rights, powers, office, and work are, also of what councils are true and what are false councils. Their duty is to confess and defend the old faith against new articles of faith; also not to set up new good works against the old good works, but to defend the old good works against the new good works. To be sure, he who defends the old faith against the new faith, also defends the old good works against the new good works. For as is the faith, so are its fruits, viz., good works, though the two councils<sup>2</sup> did not see this consequence; otherwise they would have condemned Eutyches not only because of the faith, which they did, but also because of his monkery, which they did not. On the contrary, they rather confirmed the latter and thus proved that they were poor logicians, stating a premise and not drawing the conclusion, and this becoming a plague to the whole world, for they had the same fault with regard to good works that Nestorius and Eutyches had with regard to faith. That is to say, God wills not only to make us children in faith, but in logic, too, He will hold us fools and count us as Eutyches and Nestorius, so that he may humble us. The theology of Nestorius and Eutyches was indeed condemned, but their bad logic always remains in the world, as at the beginning, affirming the premise and not admitting the conclusion. Why say much about it? Though you have all the councils, that does not yet make you a Christian; they give you too little. And though you have all the fathers, they, too, do not give you less than enough. You must go to the Holy Scriptures, where everything is abundantly given, or to the catechism,<sup>3</sup> where it is given in brief;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Luther's Preface to the Smalcald Articles (JACOBS, op. cit., 309).

<sup>2</sup> Ephesus and Chalcedon.

<sup>3</sup> The Decalogue, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, not the commentary on them, which we know by that name.

and there you will find far more than in all the councils and Fathers.

Finally. A council should have to do only with mat-  
 ters of faith, and that only when the faith is in special need. Openly evil works can be condemned, and good works admin-  
 istered at home by temporal government, pastors, and par-  
 ents. But false good works belong to matters of faith, be-  
 cause they corrupt the true faith. Therefore they, too,  
 belong in the council if the pastors are too weak, though the  
 councils, as I have said, did not trouble themselves about  
 them, except one or two of the little councils, like that at  
 Gangra, mentioned above.<sup>1</sup> Ceremonies ought to be left out  
 of the councils entirely, back in the parishes, where they are  
 at home, nay, in the schools, and the school-masters ought to  
 be the masters of ceremonies, along with the pastors, for all  
 the rest of the people learn the ceremonies from those who  
 go to school, without rules and bother.

Coun-  
cils and  
the  
Faith

For example, what, when, and how the school-boys sing  
 or pray in church, the people learn afterwards, and what they  
 sing by the bier or at the grave, the others also learn. If they  
 kneel down and fold their hands when the school-master  
 raps with his stick at the singing of the *E t h o m o f a c t u s*  
*e s t*,<sup>2</sup> the crowd does it after them, and if they doff their  
 hats and bow their knees whenever the name of Jesus Christ  
 is mentioned, and perform other Christian acts, the crowd  
 does these things after them, without any preaching, moved  
 by living examples. But under the pope all the ceremonies  
 have been taken out of the schools and parishes except  
 where the pope has sought his own tyranny, with foods,  
 fasts, feasts, etc. Yet here, too, we must use moderation,  
 in order that, in the end, the ceremonies may not become too  
 many. Above all, however, we must see to it that they are  
 not considered necessary to salvation, but only as serving  
 outward discipline and order. They can be changed at any  
 time and cannot be commanded as perpetual laws in the  
 Church, as that ass of a pope does, and set forth in the books

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> "And was made man," from the Nicene Creed.

with tyrannical threats; for they are entirely external, bodily, transitory, changeable things.

According to this, we would have, in our time, matters that would be more than important enough for the calling of a council. For we poor, wretched Christians, weak in faith and real *Misergi*; that is, "work-haters,"—those of us who are left—would have to accuse the pope and his followers on the ground of the article of St. Peter, of which you have heard before,<sup>1</sup> viz., that it is tempting God when one lays upon believers intolerable burdens, which neither we nor our forefathers have been able to bear, and which the pope and his followers, especially, will not touch with one finger. St. Peter, indeed, speaks of the law of Moses, which God Himself commanded, but the pope has oppressed us with his foul, dirty, stinking burdens, so that the holy Church has become his privy chamber, and what issues from him has had to be worshiped as God. Moreover he has set fire to and burned up, not one or two churches, as did Arius and his like, but the whole Christian Church, and has utterly wiped out, so far as he could, St. Peter's old, true article of faith; for that we must be saved only by the grace of Christ, as St. Peter testifies and as all Christendom from the beginning of the world has been saved, all patriarchs, prophets, kings, saints, etc.:—this he calls heresy, and he has condemned this article steadily, from the beginning, and cannot stop.

We call and cry for a council and beg the whole Church for counsel and help against this arch-burner of churches and slayer of Christians, so that we may get back again this article of St. Peter. But we demand, also, that no Nestorian or Eutychian logic be used, which admits or confesses one point, but denies the consequence, or other point. We demand the whole article, full and pure, as it was declared by St. Peter and taught by St. Paul. We demand, in a word, that everything be condemned whose condemnation is implied in this article<sup>2</sup>; or, as St. Peter calls it, "the intolerable impossible burden," and St. Augustine, "the countless burdens

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 188 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Dass man alles verdamme was da folget aus diesem Artickel verdammt sein.

which the bishops have laid upon the Church."<sup>1</sup> What good does it do to admit the first point, viz., that we must be justified and saved only through the grace of Christ, and not allow the second point to follow from it? St. Paul says, "If it is grace, then it is not works; if works, then it is not grace"; and St. Peter, "If it is grace, then it is not the intolerable burden; if it is the intolerable burden, then it is not grace, and it is tempting God." St. Augustine, too, says that since Christ would not burden the Church with many ceremonies, nay, would rather that it be free; therefore, it was not His will to have it oppressed by the countless burdens of the bishops, by means of which the Church has become worse than the Jews, who were burdened with God's laws but not, like the Church, with human, presumptuous, arbitrary ordinances.

Rom  
11:6

We would have this logic of St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Augustine, which is the logic of the Holy Ghost. It admits the whole argument and does not break it up in Nestorian fashion, allowing the one point to be true and not allowing the other to be true, though the second follows from the first. Otherwise it would be like what is written of some of the kings of Israel and Judah, who established again the true worship of God but did not abolish the "high-places" and other altars and other worship. The prophet Elijah calls this "limping between the two sides," and we Germans call it "wanting two brothers-in-law with one sister." They wanted to give one people two kinds of gods, or, if they reformed things, to let another, strange god stay alongside the only God. They were stupid, Nestorian logicians, confessing that only one God must be worshiped and yet not seeing that it must follow (or not letting it follow) that all other gods must be put away or they could not have the one God. Therefore, in the council which we demand we shall not tolerate any Nestorius, who gives us one thing and takes from us the other, without which we cannot keep what he gives us and is a regular give-and-taker.<sup>2</sup> For if it is granted

I Kings  
18:21

<sup>1</sup> In the often quoted letter to Januarius, Migne, xxxiii, 201.

<sup>2</sup> Luther's *Geber-nehmer* would, perhaps, be best rendered by the colloquial Americanism, "injun-giver."

us that the grace of Christ alone saves us, and if the consequence of that is not granted us, viz., that works do not save us, but it is maintained that works are necessary for satisfaction or for righteousness, that is the same thing as taking from us the first thing, which was granted us, namely that grace alone saves us, without works. Thus we keep nothing, and the evil has become only worse.

**What a  
Council  
Must Do**

I will say it in plain German! The pope, in a council, should not only utterly abolish all his tyranny of human commandments, but also hold with us that even the good works done according to God's commandments cannot help men to righteousness, to the blotting out of sin, to the attainment of God's grace, but that this can be done only by faith in Christ, who is a king of righteousness in us, by His precious blood, death, and resurrection, whereby He has blotted out sin for us, made satisfaction, reconciled God, and redeemed us from death, wrath, and hell. Therefore he should condemn and burn all his bulls, decretals, books about indulgence, purgatory, monasticism, saint-worship, and pilgrimages, together with all the countless lies and idolatries, because they rage directly against this article of St. Peter's. He should also return all that has bought, stolen, robbed, plundered, or won, especially his falsely invented primacy, which he boasts as so necessary to salvation that no one can be saved who is not subject to him; for the pope's hat did not die for my sins and its name is not Christ, and all Christians, before him and under him, have been made holy and saved without his hat.

This, I think, is a case important enough for the holding of a stately, sharp, mighty council. Emperor and kings ought to do their part here, and force the pope into it, if he is unwilling, as the emperors did in the four chief councils. But not all the bishops, abbots, monks, doctors, and the worthless rag-picker's rabble and great tail<sup>1</sup> ought to come to it. If so, it will be a council that spends the first year in arriving and in quarreling about who shall have the highest place, who precede and who follow; the second year

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., the hangers-on of the papal court.



in revelling, banqueting, racing, and fencing; the third year in other matters, burning a John Hus or two, perhaps; meanwhile the cost would be mounting until it would be enough to support a campaign against the Turks. On the contrary, it would be necessary to summon from all lands the people who were really learned in the Scriptures and whose minds and hearts were seriously concerned with God's honor, the Christian faith, the welfare of souls, and the peace of the world. Among them there should also be some intelligent and faithful men of the worldly estate,<sup>1</sup> for the case concerns them, too. If Sir Hans von Schwarzenberg<sup>2</sup> were living, he could be trusted, and men like him. It would be sufficient if there were three hundred of them altogether, picked men, to whom land and people could be trusted. So the first council<sup>3</sup> had only three hundred and eighteen members from all the lands which the Turks and our monarchs now rule, though seventy of them were false and Arians; the second, at Constantinople, had one hundred and fifty; the third, at Ephesus, two hundred; the fourth, at Chalcedon, had six hundred and thirty, almost as many as the others put together, and they were quite unequal to the fathers of Nicæa and Constantinople.

Moreover, the matters of all countries, which no one can or will judge, and old, obsolete, bad practices must not be raked up and all dumped on the neck of the council. There must be a Constantine there,<sup>4</sup> who will rake up all these things and throw them into the fire, telling them to let these matters be judged and decided at home, in their own lands, but bidding them also get down to business and get away as quickly as possible. Then the pope's heresy, nay, his abominations, would be read out, point by point, and all of it shown to have been invented, contrary to St. Peter's article and the ancient, true faith of the Church, which has held St. Peter's article since the beginning of the world; and it would be quickly condemned.

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<sup>1</sup> i.e., laymen.

<sup>2</sup> John, Baron von Schwarzenberg (1463-1528) imperial chamberlain in 1521, later an official of the Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach. Cf. *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*.

<sup>3</sup> The Council of Nicæa.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, p. 177.

No Hope  
For a  
True  
Council

"Nay," you say, "such a council is never to be hoped for." I think so myself, but if one is going to talk about it, and demand a council or wish for one, then one must wish for such a council, or else let it all go and wish for none, and keep quiet. The first council, at Nicæa, was such a council, and the second, at Constantinople, and these examples ought to be followed. And I am citing them to show that it would be the duty of emperor and kings, since they, too, are Christians, to assemble such a council for the rescue of many thousand souls whom the pope, with his tyranny and his avoidance of a council (so far as in him lies!), allows to go to destruction, and who, by means of a council, could all be brought back to St. Peter's article and the true, ancient Christian faith, though they must otherwise be lost. They cannot get this doctrine of St. Peter's, because they neither hear nor see anything of it.

Even though other monarchs would do nothing toward such a great council, the Emperor Charles and the German princes could hold a provincial council in Germany.<sup>1</sup> Some think that a schism would grow out of that; but if we did our part and earnestly sought only God's honor and the welfare of souls, who knows whether God could not yet turn the hearts of the other monarchs, so that in time they would praise and accept the judgment of this council; for it cannot happen suddenly. But if Germany were to accept it, it would have an echo in other lands also, whither it cannot, or can hardly, reach without a great preacher like a council, and a strong voice which reaches far.

Ah, well! If we must despair of a council, let us commend the case to the true judge, our merciful God. Meanwhile, we shall further the little councils and young councils, the parishes and schools, and press St. Peter's article in every possible way, and maintain it against all the damned new articles of faith and new good works, with which the pope has flooded the world. I shall comfort myself when I see the children wearing bishop's masks, thinking that God

<sup>1</sup> Luther had made this proposal nineteen years earlier. See, in this edition, *An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility*, Vol. II, 61 ff. 77 ff.

makes, and will make real bishops of these play-bishops and, on the other hand, will hold those who, according to their name, ought be real bishops as play-bishops and mockers at His majesty; as Moses says, "I will make them wroth with that which is not my people and move them to bitterness with a foolish people, because they have made me wroth with that which is not God." It will not be the first time that He has cast off bishops; He threatened it in Hosea, "Because thou rejectest the doctrine, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt not be my priest." *Et factum est ita, et ita fit.*<sup>1</sup>

Deut.  
32:21

Hos. 4:6

Let that suffice about the councils. We shall now speak, at the end, about the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> "And so it came to pass and so comes to pass."

## PART III

As they cry out "Fathers and Councils!" and do not know what fathers and councils are, but would only deafen us with the words, so they cry also about the Church; but as for saying what, who, or where the Church is, they do not render either the Church or God the service of asking the question or thinking about it. They would like to have men take them,—pope, cardinals, bishops,—for the Church and allow them, under this glorious name, to be nothing but pupils of the devil, who can practice nothing but knavery and rascality.

What  
the  
Church  
Is

Well then, setting aside many writings and many divisions of the word church, we will this time stay by the Children's Creed, which says, "I believe one holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints." There the Creed indicates clearly what the Church is, namely, "a communion of saints," that is, a group or assembly of such people as are Christians and holy. That is a Christian, holy group,<sup>1</sup> or Church. But this word "church" is not German and does not convey the sense or idea that is to be taken from this article.<sup>2</sup>

Acts 19:  
39, 41

In Acts xix, the chancellor<sup>3</sup> calls *ecclesia* the assembly or people who had run together in a crowd on the market-place, and says, "It can be settled in a regular assembly";<sup>4</sup> and again, "When he had thus spoken he dismissed the assembly." In this passage and others, *ecclesia*, or church, means nothing else than an assembled people, though they were heathen, and not Christians, just as the town-councilors summon the community to the town-hall. Now there are many peoples in the world, but the Christians are a peculiar people, a called people, and they

<sup>1</sup> Luther's *Hau fe* is here rendered "group."

<sup>2</sup> On this whole subject, cf. *On the Papacy at Rome*, in this edition, Vol. I, pp. 337-393.

<sup>3</sup> "The town-clerk" Eng. (AV and RV); "The secretary of state" (Moffatt). Acts 19:35.

<sup>4</sup> *Gemeinde*.

are therefore called not simply *ecclesia*, "church," or "people," but *sancta, catholica, Christiana*, that is, "a Christian, holy people," which believes in Christ. Therefore, it is called a Christian people and has the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies it daily, not only through the forgiveness of sins, as the Antinomians<sup>1</sup> foolishly believe, but by the abolition, purging out, and slaying of sins, and because of this they are called a holy people. "Holy Christian Church," then, is the same thing as "a people that is Christian and holy," or as we are accustomed to say, "the holy Christendom," or "the entire Christendom"; in the Old Testament it is called "God's people."

If these words had been used in the Creed: "I believe that there is a holy Christian people," it would have been easy to avoid all the misery that has come in with this blind, obscure word "church"; for the term "Christian, holy people" would have brought along with it, clearly and powerfully, both understanding and the judgment on the question "What is and what is not a church?" One who heard the words "Christian, holy people" would have been able to decide off-hand, "The pope is not a people, still less a holy Christian people." So, too, the bishops, priests, and monks are not a holy Christian people, for they do not believe in Christ, do not lead holy lives, and are the devil's wicked, shameful people. He who does not rightly believe in Christ, is not Christian or a Christian, and he who has not the Holy Ghost to resist sin, is not holy. Therefore they cannot be a Christian, holy people, that is, *sancta et catholica ecclesia*.

But because we use this blind word "church" in the Creed, the common man thinks of the stone house, which we call a church, and so the painters depict it; or if things turn out better, they paint the apostles, the disciples, and the Mother of God, as on Pentecost, with the Holy Ghost hovering over

<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 233f.

<sup>2</sup> *Christenheit*. In The Papacy at Rome Luther tried, as many times afterwards, and here, to get away from the word *Kirche*, "church." The word *Christenheit* was his favorite substitute, but even that word has often to be translated "church" in order to render its meaning correctly.

them. That will pass; but it is only the holy Christian Church of one time, the beginning. *Ecclesia*, however, ought to mean the holy Christian people, not only of the time of the apostles, who are long since dead, but clear to the end of the world, so that there is always living on earth a Christian, holy people in which Christ lives, works, and reigns *per redemptionem*, through grace and forgiveness of sins, the Holy Ghost *per vivificationem et sanctificationem*, through the daily purging out of sins and renewal of life, so that we do not remain in sin, but can and should lead a new life in good works of all kinds, such as the Ten Commandments, or Two Tables of Moses, require, and not in the old, wicked works: that is St. Paul's teaching. But the pope and his followers have applied both the name and the picture of the Church to themselves alone and to his shameful, accursed crowd, under this blind word *ecclesia*, "church."

The  
Roman  
Church  
Not the  
Chris-  
tian  
Church

Nevertheless they give themselves the right name when they call themselves *ecclesia* (if we interpret it so as to agree with their way of life), either *Romana* or *sancta*, and do not add (as, indeed, they cannot) *catholica*. For *ecclesia* means "a people," and that they are, as the Turks are also *ecclesia*, "a people." *Ecclesia Romana* means "a Roman people"; that, too, they are, and far more Roman than the heathen of ancient times were Roman. *Ecclesia Romana sancta* means "a holy Roman people," that, too, they are, for they have invented a far greater holiness than the Christian holiness, or than the holy Christian people have. Their holiness is a Roman holiness, *Romanae ecclesiae*, "a holiness of the Roman people," and they are now called even *sanctissimi*, *sacrosancti*, "the most holy," as Virgil speaks of *sacra fames*, *sacra hostia*<sup>1</sup> and Plautus of *omnium sacerrimus*,<sup>2</sup> for Christian holiness they cannot endure. Therefore they cannot have the name "Christian Church" or "Christian people," if only for the reason that Christian Church is a name and Christian holiness a

<sup>1</sup> "Holy hunger (for gold)," "holy sacrifice." *Aeneid* III, 57.

<sup>2</sup> "The most holy one of all." *Mostellaria* IV, 2.

thing that is common to all churches and all Christians in the world; therefore, it is called catholicum. But this common name and common holiness they hold cheap and almost as nothing. In its stead, they have invented a peculiar, higher, different, better holiness than that of others. It is to be called sanctitas Romana et ecclesiae Romanae sanctitas, that is, "Roman holiness" and the holiness of the Roman people."

For Christian holiness, or the holiness of universal Christendom<sup>1</sup> is that which comes when the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ, according to Acts xv, that is, He makes heart, soul, body, works and manner of life new and writes God's commandments, not on tables of stone, but on hearts of flesh according to II Corinthians iii. To speak plainly, according to the first Table He gives knowledge of God, so that those whom He enlightens can resist all heresies, in true faith, and overcome all false ideas and errors, and thus remain pure in faith against the devil. He also gives strength and comfort to feeble, despondent, weak consciences against the accusations and attacks of sin, so that souls are not despondent and do not despair and are not terrified at torment, pain, death, and God's wrath and judgment, but strengthened and comforted in hope, are bold and joyful in overcoming the devil. Thus He also gives true fear and love of God, so that we do not despise God and murmur or grow angry at His marvellous judgments, but love, praise, thank, and honor Him for all that happens. This is a new, holy life in the soul according to the First Table of Moses. It is called tres virtutes theologicas, "the three chief virtues of Christians," faith, hope, and love; and the Holy Ghost, who gives them and does and works these things for Christians whom Christ has won, is therefore called Sanctificator, or Vivificator.<sup>2</sup> For the old Adam is dead and can do nothing, and must learn from the law that he can do nothing and is dead; he would not know it of himself.

Chris-  
tian  
Holi-  
ness

Acts 15:9

II Cor.  
3:3

I Cor.  
13:13

<sup>1</sup> Gemeiner Christenheit

<sup>2</sup> Sanctifier, or Lifegiver.

In the Second Table, and in the body, He also sanctifies Christians and it is of His gift that they willingly obey parents and overlords, conduct themselves peacefully and humbly, are not wrathful or revengeful or malicious, not lewd, adulterers, unchaste, but pure and chaste, whether they have wives and children or not; and so forth. They do not steal or take usury, are not avaricious, do not cheat, etc., but work honorably, support themselves honestly, lend gladly, give and help whenever they can. Therefore, they do not lie, deceive, back-bite, but are kind, truthful, faithful, and reliable, and whatever else God's commandments require. This is done by the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies and awakens even the body to this new life, until it is completed in the life beyond. That is Christian holiness. There must always be such people on earth, even though there were but two or three of them, or they were only children; of old folk, there are, sad to say, very few! Those who are not of this sort ought not to count themselves Christians, and they ought not to be comforted, as one comforts Christians, with much talk about the forgiveness of sins and the grace of Christ, as the Antinomians do.

**The  
Anti-  
nomians**

For they,<sup>1</sup> rejecting and not understanding the Ten Commandments, preach much about the grace of Christ instead. They strengthen and comfort those who remain in sins, telling them that they shall not fear sins or be terrified at them, since through Christ, these are all done away; and yet they see people going on, and let them go on, in open sins, without any renewal or improvement of their lives. From this one observes that they really do not understand the faith and Christ aright, and abolish Him even as they preach Him. For how can a man preach rightly about the works of the Holy Ghost in the First Table and speak about comfort, grace, forgiveness of sins, if he neither heeds nor practices the works of the Holy Ghost in the Second Table, which he can understand and experience, while he has never attempted or experienced those of the First Table? Therefore it is certain that they neither have nor understand either Christ

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., The Antinomians. Cf. above, p. 233 f.



or the Holy Ghost, and their talk is mere foam on their tongues, and they are, as has been said, good Nestorians and Eutychians, who confess or teach Christ in the premise and deny Him in the conclusion, or *idiomata*; that is, they teach Christ and destroy Him by teaching Him.

That, then, is Christian holiness. The pope will not have it; he must have a peculiar holiness that is far holier. Men must be taught chasubles, tonsures, cowls, garb, food, festivals, days, monkery, nunnery, masses, saint-worship, and countless other points about external, bodily, transitory things. That one lives among these things without faith, fear of God, hope, love, and the other works of the Holy Ghost according to the First Table, but substitutes for them misbelief, uncertainty of heart, doubt, despising of God, impatience toward Him, a false trust in works (which is idolatry!) instead of a trust in the grace of Christ or His merits, making one's own satisfaction by works, even selling the surplus<sup>1</sup> to others and taking in exchange the goods and wealth of all the world as though they had been well earned: all this is no hindrance and, in spite of it, a man can be holier than Christian holiness itself.

**Papal  
Holiness**

So in regard to the Second Table. It matters not that they teach disobedience to parents and superiors, or that they murder, fight, set people at odds, envy, hate, take revenge, are unchaste, lie, steal, take usury, deceive, and practice all kinds of knavery to the limit. Just throw a surplice over your head and you are holy with the Roman church's holiness, and can be saved without Christian holiness. But we will not concern ourselves about these filthy people; what we do for them is done in vain. *Venit ira dei super eos in finem*,<sup>2</sup> as St. Paul says. We shall speak to one another about the Church.

**I Thess.  
2:16**

The Creed teaches us that a people of God must be on earth and remain until the end of the world. This is an article of faith, which cannot cease until that comes which it believes, as Christ promises, "I am with you even unto

**The  
Marks  
of the  
Church**

<sup>1</sup>The "treasury of merit" on which indulgences were based. Cf. Vol. I. p. 20, n. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"The wrath of God cometh upon them at the last."

Matt. 28:20 the end of the world." But how can a poor, erring man know where this Christian, holy people in the world is? It ought to be in this life and on earth; for it believes that a heavenly nature and an eternal life are to come, but as yet it has them not; therefore it must be in this life and this world, and remain in them until the world's end. For it says, "I believe in another life," thereby confessing that it is not yet in that life, but believes in it, hopes for it, and loves it as its own true fatherland and life, though it must remain and endure, meanwhile, in exile, as we sing in the hymn to the Holy Ghost, "When we turn home again from this exile."<sup>1</sup> Of this we shall now speak.

1. The Word First, This Christian, holy people is to be known by this, that it has God's Word, though in quite unequal measure, as St. Paul says. Some have it altogether pure, others not entirely pure. Those who have it pure are called those who build on the foundation, gold, silver, precious stones; those who have it impure are they who build hay, straw, wood on the foundation, yet will be saved through fire. Of these more than enough has been said above. This is the main point. It is the high, chief, holy possession<sup>2</sup> from which the Christian people take the name "holy," for God's Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; nay, it is the very holiness of God. Romans i says, "It is God's power, which saves all who believe thereon," and II Timothy iv, "It is all made holy by the Word of God and prayer"; for the Holy Ghost Himself administers it, and anoints and sanctifies the Church, that is, the Christian, holy people, with it<sup>3</sup> and not with the pope's chrism,<sup>4</sup> with which he anoints, or sanctifies fingers, garb, cloaks, cups, and stones. These things never teach us to love, believe, and praise God, and be godly. They only adorn the bag of worms,<sup>5</sup> but afterwards they fall apart

<sup>1</sup> The fourth line of the pre-reformation Pentecost-hymn, *Nu biten wir den heiligen geist*.

<sup>2</sup> Heiligthum. In the following discussion this word recurs continually. Each of the marks of the Church is called a Heiligthum, or Heilthum. The term "holy possession" has been chosen as the translation which best conveys its meaning. It was also the word for "relics," the wonder-working objects of reverence that were preserved in the churches, and on this idea Luther plays constantly.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., with the Word of God.

<sup>4</sup> *Madensack*, i.e., the body, which goes to decay.

<sup>5</sup> The holy oil.

and decay, with the chrism and whatever holiness is in it, and with the bag of worms itself. But this relic is the true relic, the true unction, which anoints to everlasting life, even though you can have no papal tiara or bishop's mitre, but have to live and die bare and naked of body, as children, (and all of us), are baptized naked and without adornment.

We speak, however, of the external Word orally preached by men like you and me. For Christ left this behind Him as an outward sign whereby His Church, His Christian, holy people in the world, was to be recognized. We speak, too, of this oral Word as it is earnestly believed and publicly confessed before the world, as He says, "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father and His angels"; for there are many who know it secretly, but will not confess it. Many have it and do not believe in it or act by it, for those who believe in it and act by it are few, as the parable of the seed, in Matthew xiii, tells us: three parts of the field get it and have it, but only the fourth part, the fine, good field, "bringeth forth fruit with patience."

Wherever, therefore, you hear or see this Word preached, believed, confessed, and acted on, there do not doubt that there must be a true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, a Christian, holy people, even though it be small in numbers; for God's Word does not go away empty (Isaiah lv), but must have at least a fourth part, or a piece of the field. If there were no other mark than this one alone, it would still be enough to show that there must be a Christian church there; for God's Word cannot be present without God's people, and God's people cannot be without God's Word. Who would preach or listen to preaching, if no people of God were there? And what could or would God's people believe, if God's Word were not there?

This is the thing that does all miracles, sets everything to rights, upholds everything, accomplishes everything, does everything, drives out all devils,—pilgrimage-devils, indulgence-devils, bull-devils, brotherhood devils, saints' devils, mass-devils, purgatory-devils, monastery-devils, priest-devils, devils of turbulence, devils of sedition, heretic devils, pope devils, even antinomian devils; but this does not hap-

Matt.  
13: 4ff.

Matt.  
13: 4ff.

I Pet.  
2:9

Isa.  
55:11

pen without outcries and disturbance, as is seen in the poor men of Mark i and ix. No, the devil must leave a cry and an uproar behind him, when he goes out, as is evident in Mark 1: 23, 26; 9:26 Emser,<sup>1</sup> Eck, Cochlaeus,<sup>2</sup> Schmid,<sup>3</sup> Wetzel,<sup>4</sup> Tölpel, Knebel, Filtz, Rültz,<sup>5</sup> sow, ass and the rest of his cryers and writers. They are all mouths and members of the devil, through which he makes his outcries and uproars; but it does them no good; they must go out and cannot endure the power of the Word. They themselves admit that it is God's Word and Holy Scripture, but say that we can get it better from the fathers and councils. Let them go! It is enough for us to know that this chief thing, this chief relic produces, upholds, nourishes, strengthens, and guards the Church, as St. Augustine also says, *Ecclesia Verbo dei generatur, alitur, nutritur, roboratur*;<sup>6</sup> but whoever they are that persecute it and condemn it, they give themselves a name by their own fruits.

Second. God's people, or the Christian holy people, is known by the holy Sacrament of Baptism, when it is rightly taught and believed and used according to Christ's ordinance. That, too, is a public sign and precious, holy possession<sup>7</sup> whereby God's people is made holy, for it is a holy bath of regeneration through the Holy Ghost, in which we bathe and are washed by the Holy Ghost from sin and death, as in the innocent, holy blood of the Lamb of God. Where you see this mark, know that the holy Christian people must be there, even though the pope does not baptize you or even if you know nothing about his holiness and power. The little children know nothing about that, though when they grow up they are, sad to say! led astray from their baptism, as St. Peter complains, in II Peter ii, "They entice through lasciviousness those who had escaped and who now walk in

<sup>1</sup> Emser, Eck, see Vol. III, 212, 219, 277 ff, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Rotzlöffel, Luther's favorite name for Cochlaeus.

<sup>3</sup> Johan Faber, bishop of Vienna. (d. 1541).

<sup>4</sup> George Wetzel, for a time a Lutheran pastor at Nimegk, later an advocate of Catholic reform.

<sup>5</sup> Names suggested, probably, by the sound of "Wetzel." They make little sense in English, but were used as terms of the utmost contempt.

<sup>6</sup> "The Church is begotten, cared for, nourished, strengthened by the Word of God."

<sup>7</sup> Heilthum, see above, p. 270, note 2.

error."<sup>1</sup> No, do not be confused by the question of who does the baptizing; for baptism does not belong to the baptizer and is not given to him, but it belongs to him who is baptized, for whom it was established by God and to whom it is given; just as the Word of God does not belong to the preacher (except in so far as he hears and believes it) but to him who hears and believes, and to him it is given.

Third. God's people, or a Christian, holy Church is known by the holy Sacrament of the Altar, when it is rightly administered according to Christ's institution and is believed and received. That, too, is a public mark and precious, holy possession,<sup>2</sup> bequeathed by Christ, whereby His people is made holy. By means of this sacrament it exercises itself in faith, and openly confesses that it is a Christian people, as it does also by means of the Word of God and baptism. Here again you need not ask whether the pope says mass for you or not, consecrates you, confirms or anoints you, or puts a chasuble on you.<sup>3</sup> You can receive the mass with no clothing at all, as one may who is sick in bed, except that outward decency compels the wearing of decent and honorable clothing. Nor do you need to ask whether you have a tonsure or have been anointed;<sup>4</sup> nor need you argue about whether you are man or woman, young or old, any more than you would ask about all these things in connection with baptism or preaching. It is enough that you are consecrated and anointed with the high and holy oil of God, of the Word of God, of baptism, and of this sacrament; then you are anointed highly and gloriously enough and dressed in a sufficient priestly garb. Do not be led astray by the question whether the man who gives you the sacrament is holy, or whether he has two wives or not.<sup>5</sup> For the sacrament does not belong to him who administers it, but to him to whom it is administered, unless he also takes it. In that case he is one of those who receive it, and it is given to him also.

3. The  
Lord's  
Supper

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<sup>1</sup> Luther follows the Vulgate.

<sup>2</sup> *Heilium*, see above, p. 270, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Messgewand*, the vestment worn by the priest at mass.

<sup>4</sup> A reference to the holy oil, used in ordination.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 278.

Where you see this sacrament administered with a right usage, be sure that God's people is there. It was said above about the Word, where God's Word is, there must the Church be; so, also, where Baptism and the Sacrament<sup>1</sup> are, there must God's people be, and vice versa. For these holy things no one has, gives, practices, uses, or confesses, except God's people only, even though some false and unbelieving Christians are secretly among them. These people do not deprive the people of God of its holiness, especially so long as they are present secretly, for open sinners the Church, or people of God, does not tolerate in its midst, but punishes<sup>2</sup> them and makes them holy; or, if they will not suffer that, it casts them out of the holy place by means of the ban and holds them as heathen (Matthew xviii).

Matt.  
18:17

4. The  
Keys

Matt.  
18:15ff.

Fourth. The people of God, or holy Christians, are known by the keys,<sup>3</sup> which they publicly use. Christ decrees, in Matthew xviii that if a Christian sins, he shall be rebuked, and if he does not amend his ways, he shall be bound and cast out; but if he amends, he shall be set free. This is the power of the keys. Now the use of the keys is two-fold,—public, and private.<sup>4</sup> There are some whose consciences are so weak and timid, that even if they have received no public condemnation, they cannot be comforted unless they get a special absolution from the pastor. On the other hand, there are some who are so hard they will not have their sins individually forgiven and remitted even in their hearts and by the pastor. Therefore the use of the keys must be of both kinds, public and private. Now wherever you see the sins of some persons forgiven or rebuked, publicly or privately, know that God's people is there; for if God's people is not there, the keys are not there; and if the keys are not there, God's people is not there. Christ has bequeathed them as a public mark and holy possession,<sup>5</sup> whereby the Holy Ghost, won through Christ's death, imparts holiness anew to fallen sinners and by them Christians confess that they are a holy people, under Christ, in this world; and those

<sup>1</sup> i.e., The Sacrament of the Altar.   <sup>2</sup> Or "rebukes."

<sup>3</sup> The "power of the keys" is the power to forgive sins. See below.

<sup>4</sup> Or "general" and "particular."   <sup>5</sup> Heilium; see above, p. 270, note 2.

who will not be converted and made holy again are to be cast out of this holy people; that is, they are to be bound and excluded by means of the keys, as will happen to the Antinomians if they do not repent.

You must not think of these keys, however, as the pope's two keys which he has turned into tools with which he picks the locks to the treasure-chests and crowns of all kings.<sup>1</sup> If he will not "bind" or rebuke sin either publicly or privately (and he will not!), then do you rebuke and "bind" it in your parish; and if he will not "loose," or forgive it, then do you "loose" and forgive it in your parish. His "reserving" and "binding," and his "relaxing" and dispensation make you neither holy nor unholy, since he cannot have the keys, but only lock-picking tools. The keys belong, not to the pope, as he lyingly says, but to the Church, that is, to Christ's people, God's people, the holy Christian people throughout the world, or wherever there are Christians. They cannot all be at Rome, unless the whole world were at Rome, and that has not happened yet. As Baptism, the Sacrament, and God's Word do not belong to the pope but to the Church, so with the keys, they are *claves ecclesiae*, not *claves papae*.<sup>2</sup>

Fifth. The Church is known outwardly by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers,<sup>3</sup> or has offices which they occupy. For we must have bishops, pastors, or preachers, to give, administer and use, publicly and privately, the four things, or precious possessions,<sup>4</sup> that have been mentioned, for the sake of and in the name of the Church, or rather because of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul says, in Ephesians iv, *Acceptit dona in hominibus*,<sup>5</sup> "and gave some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers and governors, etc." The whole group cannot do these things, but must commit them, or allow them to be

5. The  
Ministry

Eph.  
4:11

<sup>1</sup> Luther had previously discussed this subject at length in his work *On the Keys* (1530). Weimar Ed., XXX<sup>2</sup>, 435 ff.; Erlangen Ed. XXXI, 126 ff.

<sup>2</sup> "The Church's keys, not the pope's keys."

<sup>3</sup> *Kirchendiener*.

<sup>4</sup> *Heilium*. See above, p. 270, note 2.

<sup>5</sup> "He received gifts among men." Luther is quoting, as usual, from memory, and confuses Eph. 4:8 with Ps. 68:19, from which the Ephesian passage quotes.

committed, to someone. What would happen if everyone wanted to speak or administer the sacraments and no one would yield to another? This duty must be committed to one person, and he alone must be allowed to preach, baptize, absolve, and administer the sacraments; all the rest must be content with this and agree to it. Wherever you see this, be assured that God's people, the Christian, holy people, is present.

It is true, indeed, that the Holy Ghost has made exception, in this matter, of women, children, and incompetent folk, and, except in cases of necessity, chooses only qualified males. Thus we read here and there in St. Paul's epistles that a bishop must be apt to teach, pious, and the husband of one wife, and in I Corinthians xiv, that a woman shall not teach in the assembly. In a word, it shall be a well-prepared, selected man, and children, women, and other persons are not qualified for it, though they are qualified to hear God's Word and to receive baptism, the Sacrament, and absolution, and are true, holy fellow-Christians,<sup>1</sup> as St. Peter says. This distinction is made in Nature and in God's creation also, where no woman (still less children and fools!) can or ought have rulership, as experience tells us, and Moses says, in Genesis iii, "Thou shalt be in subjection to thy husband." The Gospel does not abolish this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God.

**Classes  
of Min-  
isters**

Here the pope, with his loud-mouthed uproar-makers for the devil<sup>2</sup> will interrupt me, and say: "St Paul speaks not only of pastors and preachers, but also of apostles, evangelists, prophets, and other high spiritual classes;<sup>3</sup> therefore there must be in the Church higher classes than the pastors and preachers. Where now, Sir Luther?" Where? This is where! If they will become apostles, evangelists, prophets, or will show me one such; oh, what folly I am talking—if they will show me one person among them who is worth as much as a school-boy, or who can do as much with Holy Scripture as a seven-year-old girl, I will give

<sup>1</sup> i.e., Fellow-Christians with the ministers.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 271f.

<sup>3</sup> Or "higher clergy."



up. Now I know for certain that an apostle, evangelist, prophet can do more than a seven-year-old girl. I speak in respect of the Holy Scriptures and of faith; for that they can do more in doctrines of men and in rascality; that I thoroughly believe, even more strongly than I believe in God, because they are proving it before my eyes by the things that they are doing. Therefore, as they are the Church, so they are also apostles, evangelists, and prophets;<sup>1</sup> for true apostles, evangelists, and prophets preach God's Word, not against God's Word.

Now, if the apostles, evangelists, and prophets have ceased, others must have arisen in their stead, and must continue to arise until the end of the world; for the Church shall not cease until the end of the world, and therefore apostles, evangelists, prophets must continue, by whatever names they may be called who are occupied with God's Word and work. The pope and his followers, who persecute God's Word and yet admit that it is true, must be very bad apostles, evangelists, and prophets, like the devil and his angels. But how I do come back to the pope's shameful, filthy people! Let them go again, and tell them not to come back!

It was said above about the other four points of the great, divine, holy possession<sup>2</sup> whereby the holy Church is made holy, that you ought not to be concerned about who they are from whom it is received. So here, too, you ought not to ask who he is that gives it to you, or who has the official position. It is all given, not to him who has the office, but to him who, through his office, is to give it, except, of course, that he can get it with you, if he will. If he is in office and is tolerated by the assembly, let that be enough for you; his person makes God's Word and sacraments neither worse nor better for you. For what he says or does is not his own, but it is Christ, his Lord, and the Holy Ghost who speak and act through him, in so far as he stays within the right way of teaching and acting, though the Church cannot and ought not endure open vices;<sup>3</sup> but as for yourself, be

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<sup>1</sup>i.e., They are no more apostles, etc., than they are the Church.

<sup>2</sup>Heilium, Cf. above, p. 270, note 2.

<sup>3</sup>i.e., in its ministers.

content and let it go; you alone cannot be the whole group, or the Christian, holy people.

**Celibacy** But you must not consider<sup>1</sup> the pope, who forbids any married man to be called to this office, but declares, with Nestorian logic, that they must all be pure virgins. That is as much as to say that all the clergy must be pure, but that they themselves may be impure. But look at that! You are coming at me again with the pope, and I did not want you any more! Ah, well; unwelcome guest though you are, I will give you a Lutheran reception.

**Bigamy** The pope condemns the marriage of the bishops or pastors; that is plain enough. Not satisfied with that, he condemns bigamy far more strongly, and, to speak out clearly, he distinguishes four kinds of bigamists, if not five. I will call a bigamist one who has two wives, one who marries twice, or takes another's widow. The first kind of bigamist is one who marries two maids in succession; the second kind, one who takes a widow to wife; the third kind, one who takes a bride whose deceased husband has left her a virgin. The fourth kind of bigamist gets the name shamefully; if he marries a virgin and afterwards finds that she was not pure, not a virgin; in the pope's eyes he must be a bigamist, and a far worse one than he who took another's bride who was a virgin. All these stink and have an evil smell in the Canon Law.<sup>2</sup> They dare not preach, baptize, administer the sacraments or hold any office in the Church, even though they were holier than St. John and their wives holier than the Mother of God. So marvellously holy is the pope in his decrees!

If a man have ravished a hundred virgins, violated a hundred widows, and still have a hundred harlots behind his back, he may become bishop or pope, and even though he were to continue this kind of doings, he would, nevertheless, be tolerated in these offices; but if he gets a bride who is a virgin, or a pretended virgin, he cannot be God's servant.

<sup>1</sup> This whole section repeats the ideas of a sermon preached by Luther, March 2, 1539. Cf. Weimar Ed. XLVII, 676.

<sup>2</sup> The Weimar Ed. gives the following references: Decret. Grat., dist. 26, cap. 13; dist. 34, cap. 9-18; Decret. Greg. lib. I, tit. 21.

It makes no difference that he is a true Christian, learned, pious, useful; he is a bigamist, and must get out of his office and never come back to it again. What think you? Is that not a higher holiness than that of Christ Himself, with the Holy Ghost and His Church? Christ does not spurn men with one wife or two wives and women with one husband or two,<sup>1</sup> if they believe in Him. He lets them remain members of His holy Christian people; uses them, also, in those things for which they are, or can be, useful. The Holy Scriptures give the name of bigamist to one who, like Lamech, has two wives living at the same time; but the pope is more learned, and gives the name of bigamist to one who has two wives in succession, and so with the women. He is far more learned than God Himself.

Gen.  
4:19

Finer still, the pope himself admits that the marriage of a bigamist<sup>2</sup> is a true marriage and is no sin against God, world, or Church, and that such a marriage is a sacrament of the Church; and yet the man must be rejected from office-holding in the Church, even though he belongs to the third or fourth class<sup>3</sup> and ought rather be called a man with one wife, or the husband of a virgin. Why so? Ei, the fault lies here! Such a marriage cannot be a sacrament or figure of Christ and the Church; for Christ has only one bride, the Church, and the Church only one husband, Christ, and both remain virgin. On this point there is so much sheer nonsense talked that no one can tell it all, and the canonists ought really be called lawyers for asses.

In the first place, if marriage is to be a sacrament<sup>4</sup> of Christ and the Church, then no marriage can be a sacrament unless both bridegroom and bride remain virgin; for Christ and the Church remain virgin. Whence, then, shall we get children and heirs? What will become of the estate of marriage that God has instituted? In a word, there will be no marriages but that of Mary and Joseph and others like it;

Marriage

<sup>1</sup> This is not intended by Luther as a defense of bigamy. He only wants to show the absurdity and the wrong of the meaning attached to "bigamy" by the Canon Law, the "successive" and "interpretative" bigamy, which he has described in the preceding paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., A second marriage.

<sup>3</sup> Of those mentioned above.

<sup>4</sup> Or "type"; see above.

none of the rest of the marriages can be a sacrament; perhaps they may even be harlotry.

Eph.  
5:32

In the second place, who has ever taught this or appointed it, that we must keep it? "St. Paul," say they, "says in Ephesians iv, that man and wife are a great sacrament." Yes, say I, "in Christ and the Church." Dear fellow, can you get it out of these words of Paul that marriage is the kind of a sacrament that they speak of? He says, "Man and wife are one body; this is a great sacrament."<sup>1</sup> Then he interprets this himself: "I speak of Christ and the Church, not of man and wife." They say that he is speaking of man and wife. Paul will have Christ and the Church to be a great sacrament, or "mystery"; they say that man and wife are a great sacrament. Why, then, do they hold it for almost the least of the sacraments, nay, for impurity and sin, in which one cannot serve God? Moreover, can you find it in St. Paul's words that men and women who are married a second time are not man and wife, or one flesh? If they are one flesh, why are they not also a sacrament of Christ in the Church? St. Paul speaks in general, of all married men and women who become one flesh, whether they have never been married before or are widowed, and calls them a sacrament, as you understand the word "sacrament." Whence, then, are you so clever as to make a difference in marriage and take only the single marriage as a sacrament of Christ and the Church,—the marriage, namely, in which a man marries a virgin,—and exclude all other marriages? Who has commissioned you thus to torture and force St. Paul's words?

Besides, you do not hold even such a marriage as a sacrament. For bridegrooms do not let their brides remain virgins, and they do not take husbands in order that they may stay virgins, which they could do much better without husbands; but they desire and ought to bear children; God has made them for that. Where now is the sacrament of Christ and the Church, both of whom remained virgin? Is

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<sup>1</sup> This is the Vulgate text. The English versions and Luther himself (see below) render the Greek correctly, "This is a great mystery."

it a fine argument a figura ad historiam, vel e contra, ab historia ad figuram?<sup>1</sup> Where did you learn such logic? Christ and the Church are married, but remain virgin in the body; therefore man and wife shall remain virgin in the body also. Again: Christ is married only to a virgin, therefore a Christian or priest shall be married only to a virgin, otherwise there is no sacrament. Why, then, do you yield the point and say that the marriage of a widow is a sacrament, because it is a marriage, and yet is not a sacrament, because the wife was not a virgin? Are you not mad and foolish, and gross Nestorians, not knowing when you say yes or no, saying one thing in the premise and another in the conclusion? Away with such asses and fools!

Another error has come out of this one (unless indeed, this one has come out of the other). They have called the bishops and popes bridegrooms of the Church.<sup>2</sup> They cite for this the word of St. Paul, "A bishop shall be the husband of one wife," that is, the bishop of one church, as Christ is the bridegroom of one Church; therefore they shall not be bigamists. Verily, popes and bishops are fine fellows to be bridegrooms of the Church, nay, of brothel-keepers and devil's daughters in hell! True bishops are servants of this bride and she is lady and mistress over them. St. Paul calls himself *diaconus*, "a servant of the Church," and will not be bridegroom or lord of this bride, but the true bridegroom of this bride is called Jesus Christ, Son of God. St. John says not, "I am the bridegroom," but, "I am the friend of the bridegroom and rejoice to hear his speech." "For he that hath the bride," saith he, "is the bridegroom." His speech one should hear with joy, and thereafter think of himself as a servant.

I Tim.  
3:2

I Cor.  
3:5

John  
3:29

How finely they themselves observe even this tomfoolery! A bishop has three bishoprics;<sup>3</sup> yet he must be called "husband of one wife." Even though he has only one bishopric, he still has a hundred, two hundred, five hundred, or more parishes, or churches; yet he is bridegroom of one Church.

<sup>1</sup> "From figure to fact, or conversely, from fact to figure."

<sup>2</sup> In the Canon Law, *Decret. Grat.*, dist. 26, cap. 2.

<sup>3</sup> A possible allusion to Albrecht of Mainz.

The pope would be bridegroom of all churches, large and small; yet he is called husband of one Church. These men are not *digami*, "bigamists," though they have all these brides at one time; but a man who marries a virgin who has been betrothed to another is a *digamus*. Such gross and monstrous folly will God inflict upon us, if we despise His Word and want to improve on His commands.

Nay, they have an *Acutius* in their *Decretum*<sup>1</sup> in which St. Augustine holds, against St. Jerome, that he who had a wife before he was baptized and has one afterwards is a bigamist. Dear jack-asses, does it follow from this that St. Augustine, even though he holds such a man a bigamist (which the Scriptures do not!), will have him condemned, as you do, so that he may not serve God? And even though this should follow, have you not to the contrary, in *dist.* 9, a strong *noli meis*?<sup>2</sup> How is it that you hold so fast to the *Acutius*, though it is contrary to Scripture, and pass over so lightly the *Noli meis* and other chapters? This is your idea: you would be lords of the Church; what you say shall be right; marriage shall be right and a sacrament, if you will it so; marriage shall be an impurity, that is, a defiled sacrament that cannot serve God, if you will it so; marriage shall bear children and the wife yet remain a virgin or it is no sacrament of Christ and the Church, if you will it so; bigamists are without guilt and have a true marriage and sacrament, if you will it so; or they are condemned and cannot do God service and have no sacrament of Christ and the Church, if you will it so. See how the devil, who teaches you this nonsense, makes you reel around and wobble back and forth.

How comes it that I must hold Augustine's saying an article of faith,<sup>3</sup> if he himself will not have his sayings held as articles of faith and will not suffer the sayings of his predecessors as articles of faith? Suppose that the dear fathers did hold and teach that *digamus* was 'the name

<sup>1</sup>i.e., In the Canon Law. *Acutius* is the first word of the quotation from Augustine in *Decret. Grat. dist.* 26, cap. 2; the quotation from Jerome, *ibid.*, cap. 1.

<sup>2</sup>See above, p. 148, where Luther quotes the passage.

<sup>3</sup>In the passage *Noli meis*, referred to above.

for the sort of man we have been speaking of; what has that to do with us? We need not so hold and teach for that reason. We must not found our salvation on the words and works of men, or our houses on hay and straw. But the canonists are such gross fools, with their idols at Rome, that they take the words and deeds of the dear fathers and, against their will and without their consent, make them articles of faith. It should be proved by Scripture that such men are to be called bigamists and trigamists, and then it would be right that they should not be servants of the church according to St. Paul's teaching, "A bishop shall be the husband of one wife." But it has happened often enough that the fathers have sewed old patches on new cloth. Here is a case. It is right that no *digamus* shall be a servant of the Church,—that is the new cloth; but that this or that man is a *digamus*, that is an old rag of their own opinion, because the Scriptures do not say it. In the Scriptures, a bigamist is one who has two wives living at the same time, and St. Paul was thought to have had a wife<sup>1</sup> (Philippians iv) and that she had died. Accordingly, he, too, must have been a bigamist and have been compelled to give up his office of apostle; for in I Corinthians vii he counts himself among the widowed, and yet, in I Corinthians ix, he wants to have the right, along with Barnabas, to take another wife. Who will assure us that the poor fishermen, Peter, Andrew, and James, were married to virgins, and not to widows, and had not two wives in succession?

I Tim.  
3:2

The blockheads have not the same idea of purity that the fathers had, but would lead poor souls astray and endanger them, only in order that their nasty, stinking book<sup>2</sup> may be right, and that their science may not be able to err and may not have erred; otherwise they would see what is considered purity. In other opinions (and what is this but a matter of mere opinions?) they can say finely: *Non tenetur, hoc tenere*<sup>3</sup>; why can they not do it here,

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<sup>1</sup>This conclusion rests on a mistaken interpretation of Phil. 4:3 and I Cor. 7:8.

<sup>2</sup>The Canon Law.

<sup>3</sup>"It is not held; but hold this."

especially since in *causis decidendis*<sup>1</sup> they have to throw away not one father only, but all of them together, as their idol sputters and bellows? But they want to rule the Church, not with assured wisdom, but with arbitrary opinions, while on the other hand, they lead all the souls in the world astray and throw them into uncertainty, as they have done before. But just as they reject all the fathers and theologians from their canons, so we reject them from the Church and the Scriptures. They shall neither teach us Scripture nor rule in the Church, but shall look after their canons and their quarrels over pretends; that is their holiness. They have put us poor theologians and all the fathers out of their books; and we thank them for it. Now they want to put us out of the Church and the Scriptures, and they cannot get in themselves. That is too much! It rips the bag wide open! Moreover we shall not put up with it!

I hold, in truth, that according to their wisdom no man would be able to take a maid to wife and, after her death, become a priest among them; for who can give him any guarantee that he is getting a maid? "The road runs past the door,"<sup>2</sup> as they say. Now if he find her not a maid, a chance that he has to take, then he is a stinking bigamist, without any fault of his own. If he would be certain that he can become a priest, he must take no maid to wife; for who will assure him of it? He may, however, ravish maids, widows, and wives, have many mistresses, and practice all kinds of silent sins; and yet be worthy of the priestly state. The sum of it all is that pope, devil, and his church hate the estate of matrimony, as Daniel says; therefore he wants to bring it into such disgrace that a married man cannot fill a priest's office. That is as much as to say that marriage is harlotry, sin, impure, and rejected by God; and although they say, at the same time, that it is holy and a sacrament, that is a lie of their false hearts, for if they seriously considered it holy, and a sacrament, they would not forbid the priests to marry. Because they do forbid them, they must consider it unclean, and a sin, as they plainly say, *Munda-*

Dan.

17:37

<sup>1</sup> "In the cases to be decided."

<sup>2</sup> A proverb, equivalent to, "Mistakes are easy."



mini qui fertis<sup>1</sup>; or else they must be gross Nestorians and Eutychians, who affirm a premise and deny the conclusion.

Isa.  
52:11

Let this suffice this time for the papal ass with his asinine jurists. We return to our own people.

Pay no heed, as I have said, to the papists concerning who it is that occupies Church offices, for the asses do not understand St. Paul and do not know what St. Paul's language calls a sacrament. "Sacrament," he says, "is Christ and His Church," that is, Christ and His Church are one body, as are man and wife; but this is a great mystery and must be laid hold upon by faith; it is not visible or tangible, therefore it is a sacrament, i.e., a secret thing, *mysterium*, invisible, hidden. Since, however, not those only who have entered matrimony as virgins, but also those who marry out of widowhood, are one body, therefore every marriage is a figure or symbol of this great sacrament, or mystery, in Christ and the Church. St. Paul speaks neither of virgins nor widows; he speaks of marriage, in which man and wife are one body. Wherever, then, you find these offices and officers, there be sure that the holy, Christian people must be. The Church cannot be without bishops, pastors, preachers, priests; on the other hand, they cannot be without the Church; both must be together.

Eph.  
5:32

**Sixth.** The holy, Christian people is known by prayer and public thanksgiving and praise to God. Where you see and hear that the Lord's Prayer is prayed and the use of it is taught; where Psalms, or spiritual songs, are sung, in accordance with the Word of God and the right faith; when the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Catechism are openly used;—there be sure that a holy Christian people is; for prayer, too, is one of the precious holy possessions,<sup>2</sup> whereby everything is made holy, as St. Paul says. Thus the Psalms also are nothing but prayers, in which praise, thanks and honor are rendered to God, and the Creed and Ten Commandments, and God's Word, too, are all holy possessions,<sup>3</sup> whereby the Holy Ghost makes holy the holy

**6. Prayer**

I Tim.  
4:5

<sup>1</sup> "Thou must be clean, who bearest (the vessels of the Lord)".

<sup>2</sup> *Der heiltumb eins*. See above, p. 270, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Eitel heilthum*.

people of Christ. We speak, however, of prayers and songs that can be understood, from which it is possible to learn and whereby men may amend their lives; for the noises made by monks and nuns and priests are not prayers or praises to God. They do not understand it and learn nothing from it; they do it like hard labor,<sup>1</sup> for the belly's sake, and seek thereby no improvement of life, no progress in holiness, no doing of God's will.

7. Suffering

Seventh. The holy, Christian Church is outwardly known by the holy possession<sup>2</sup> of the Holy Cross. It must endure all hardship and persecution, all kinds of temptation and evil (as the Lord's Prayer says) from devil, world, and flesh; it must be inwardly sad, timid, terrified; outwardly poor, despised, sick, weak; thus it becomes like its head, Christ.<sup>3</sup> The reason must be only this,—that it holds fast to Christ and God's Word and thus suffers for Christ's sake, according to Matthew v, "Blessed are they that endure persecution for my sake." They must be righteous, quiet, obedient, ready to serve their rulers and everyone else with body and wealth, doing no one any harm. But no people on earth must endure such bitter hatred. They must be worse than Jews, heathen, Turks; they must be called heretics, knaves, devils, accursed, and the worst people in the world, to the point where they are "doing God service" who hang them, drown them, slay them, torture them, hunt them down, plague them to death, and where no one has pity on them, but gives them myrrh and gall to drink, when they thirst,—not because they are adulterers, murderers, thieves or scoundrels, but because they will to have Christ alone, and no other God. Where you see or hear this, there know that the holy Christian Church is, as He says, in Matthew v, "Blessed are ye, when men curse you and reject your name as an evil, wicked thing for my sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward in heaven is great." With this holy possession<sup>4</sup> the Holy Ghost makes this people, not only holy, but blessed.

Matt.  
5:10

Matt.  
5:11, 12

And be not concerned with the holy things of the papists,

<sup>1</sup> *Eselserbeit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Heilthum.* See above, p. 270, note 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. Vol. I, p. 38.*

<sup>4</sup> *Heilthum.* See above, p. 270, note 2.

with dead saints and wood of the Holy Cross; for they are as often bones from the slaughter-house as bones of saints and as often wood from some gallows as wood of the Holy Cross. It is all a cheat, by which the pope tricks people out of their money and leads them away from Christ, and even though they were genuine relics, they would make no one holy. But when you are condemned for Christ's sake, cursed, accused, slandered, plagued,—that makes you holy, for it slays the old Adam, and makes him learn patience, humility, gentleness, teaching him to praise and thank God and to be joyful in suffering. That is what it means to be made holy by the Holy Ghost and renewed to the new life in Christ and thus we learn to believe God, trust Him, hope in Him, love Him; as Romans v says, Tribulation Rom. 5:4 spem,<sup>1</sup> etc.

These are the true seven chief parts of the high and holy possession<sup>2</sup> whereby the Holy Ghost works in us a daily sanctification and vivification in Christ according to the First Table of Moses.<sup>3</sup> By their help we fulfil it, though not so fully as Christ has done; but we constantly seek to do so, under redemption, or forgiveness of sin, until at last we become quite holy and need no more forgiveness. To that end it is all directed. I would even call these seven things the seven sacraments, but this word, "sacrament," has been misused by the papists and is used in another sense in Scripture, therefore I let them remain simply seven chief means of Christian sanctification, or seven holy possessions.<sup>4</sup>

Beside these seven chief things, there are other outward signs whereby the holy Christian Church is known, viz., those whereby the Holy Ghost makes us holy according to the Second Table of Moses,<sup>5</sup>—as when he helps us to honor father and mother from the heart, and helps them to raise their children in a Christian way and to lead honorable lives; when we serve our princes and lords faithfully and obediently and are subject to them, and they, in turn, love

Other  
Marks  
of the  
Church

<sup>1</sup> "Tribulation worketh hope."

<sup>2</sup> Heilthum.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., A life that fulfils the commandments of the first table, which refer to duty owed to God.

<sup>4</sup> Heilthumb.

<sup>5</sup> The commandments which declare the duties owed to fellowmen.

their subjects and protect and guard them; when we are angry with no one, bear no wrath, hatred, envy, or vengeance toward our neighbor, but gladly forgive him, gladly lend to him, help and counsel him; when we are not unchaste, immoderate in drinking, proud, haughty, boastful, but pure, self-controlled, sober, kindly, gentle, and humble; do not steal, rob, take usury, indulge in greed, cheat, but are mild, kind, satisfied, generous; are not false, lying and per-juring, but truthful, reliable, and whatever else is taught in these commandments, all of which St. Paul teaches abundantly in more than one place. For we need the Decalog not only because it tells us in legal fashion what we are bound to do, but also in order that we may see in it how far the Holy Ghost has brought us in His sanctifying work, and how much we still fall short, so that we may not become careless and think that we have now done all that is required. Thus we are constantly to grow in sanctification and ever to become more and more "a new creature" in Christ. The word is *Crescite* and *Abundetis* magis.<sup>1</sup>

These marks cannot, however, be considered to be as certain as the others,<sup>2</sup> because the heathen have practiced these works and sometimes appear holier than the Christians. Nevertheless their actions do not come so purely and simply from the heart for God's sake, but they seek some other end thereby, since they have no real faith and no true knowledge of God. But the Holy Ghost is here,<sup>3</sup> and He sanctifies men's hearts, and brings these fruits out of good, fine hearts, as Christ says in the parable, in Matthew xiii; and yet because the First Table is higher and must be a greater holy possession,<sup>4</sup> I have tried to gather all this up in the Second Table; otherwise I should have divided this, too, into seven holy possessions, or main points, according to the seven Commandments.<sup>5</sup>

We now know for certain what, where, and who the holy

<sup>1</sup> "Increase" (II Pet. 3:18) and "Abound more and more" (I Thess. 4:1).

<sup>2</sup> i.e., Those which Luther has called "the seven holy possessions" of the Church.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., Among the Christians, as He is not among the heathen.

<sup>4</sup> Heilthum.

<sup>5</sup> In Luther's division, the First Table contained three Commandments; the Second Table seven

Matt.  
13:23  
Luke  
8:15

Christian Church is, viz., the holy Christian people of God, and these marks cannot fail,—of that we are sure. All else beside them may fail, and does assuredly fail, as we shall hear in part. From out of this people men should be taken to form a council and that might be a council which was ruled by the Holy Ghost. Thus Lyra,<sup>1</sup> too, says that the Church is not to be counted by the high, or spiritual, classes in it, but by the people who truly believe. It is a wonder to me that he was not burned for this statement, since he will not allow that popes, cardinals, bishops and prelates are the Church, and this results in horrible heresy which the holy Roman Church cannot endure and which touches it far too closely. Of this more in another place!

Now when the devil saw God building this holy Christian Church, he took no holiday, but built his own chapel alongside it, greater than God's temple, and this is how he did it. He saw that God took outward things,—baptism, Word, Sacrament, keys,—and used them to make His church holy; and because he is always aping God and trying to imitate God and improve on Him in everything, he, too, took outward things that were to become means to holiness (acting just as he does with the rain-makers, conjurers, drivers-out of devils, etc.) and he even has the Lord's Prayer prayed over them and the Gospels read over them. Thus through the popes and the papists he has caused the consecration, or hallowing, of water, salt, herbs, candles, bells, images, *agnus dei*,<sup>2</sup> *pallia*,<sup>3</sup> chasubles, tonsures, fingers, hands,—who will count all these things? At last he made the monks' cowls so holy that people died in them and were buried in them, as though by so doing they were saved.<sup>4</sup>

Feigned  
Marks  
of the  
Church

It would have been a fine thing, to be sure, if God's Word, or a blessing, or a prayer, had been said over these created things, as children say them over their food, or over themselves, when they go to bed or arise. Of this St. Paul says

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1340), one of the most famous of the mediæval commentators on the Bible. Luther refers to him frequently and the present passage is quoted by Melancthon in the *Apology*, Ch. IV. (MUELLER p. 156, 22; JACOB, *Book of Concord*, p. 166).

<sup>2</sup> Amulets of wax, stamped with the image of the Lamb of God and worn as charms.

<sup>3</sup> The insignia of the archbishop's office. See Vol. I, p. 89, n. 3.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 248f.

I Tim.  
4:4

"Every creature is good and is sanctified by the Word and prayer," for from such a practice "the creature" gets no new power, but is confirmed and strengthened in its former power. But the devil is after something else! He wants "the creature" to get new power and might from his mummery. By means of God's Word, water becomes baptism, that is, a bath unto everlasting life, which washes away sins and saves men, though this is not the natural power of water; bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ; by the laying-on of hands, sins are forgiven according to God's institution. In just the same way the devil would have his jugglery and mummery endued with power and do something supernatural. Holy water is to blot out sin, drive out devils, keep off evil spirits, and protect women in child-bed, as the pope teaches in the canon *Aquam sale, de pe<sup>3</sup>*; consecrated salt is to have the same effect. *An agnus dei* consecrated by the pope is to do more than God Himself can do, as this is described in verses that I shall some day publish with notes. Bells are to drive away the devils in thunder-storms; St. Anthony's knives stab the devil; the blessing of herbs drives away poisonous worms; certain blessings heal sick cows, keep off milk-thieves,<sup>2</sup> quench fires; certain writings give security, in war and at other times, against iron, fire, water, wild beasts, etc.; monastic vows, masses, and the like confer a salvation that is beyond the ordinary. Who can tell it all? There is no need so small that the devil has not instituted a sacrament, or holy possession,<sup>3</sup> for it, whereby one may find aid and counsel against it. Besides, he has also had prophets, seers, and wise men, who have been able to reveal hidden things and restore stolen goods.

Oh, he, far more than God, is fitted out with sacraments, prophets, apostles, evangelists; his chapels are far larger than God's Church; and he has far more people in his kind of holiness than God has in His. Moreover, people believe

<sup>1</sup>The canon referred to is found in *Decret. Grat. III, dist. 3, c. 20*. The *de pe* is either a slip of the pen or a misprint for *de co* (*de consecratione*), the title of the chapter containing this canon.

<sup>2</sup>i.e., Witches who make cows go dry.

<sup>3</sup>*Heilthum*; see above, p. 270, note 2.

more easily and more gladly in his promises, his sacraments, his prophets, than in Christ's. He is the great god of the world; Christ calls him "Prince of the world," and Paul "God of this world." With this apéry he draws people away from faith in Christ and causes Christ's Word and sacraments to be despised. He does this quite without their knowledge, because it is easier to perceive such things as the blotting out of sin, aid in time of need, and the conferring of salvation, through the devil's sacraments than through Christ's sacraments. It is Christ's will to make people holy and good in body and soul by His Holy Spirit, and not let them stay in unbelief and sin. This is too hard for those who do not want to be good or to have their sins forgiven, and they can readily dispense with this work of the Holy Ghost, after they have learned that they can be saved more easily, without this work of the Holy Ghost, by such means as holy water, *agnus dei*, bulls and breves, masses and monks' cowls, and that it is not necessary to seek or to revere anything else.

John  
14:30  
II Cor.  
4:4

Not only so, but the devil has so fitted himself out with these things that he has wanted to use them for the abolition of God's Word and sacraments. He has thought thus: "If anyone shall arise who shall attack my church, sacraments, and bishops, saying that external things do not save men, then God's Word and sacraments shall be destroyed along with them. For these, too, are outward signs, and His bishops and His Church are also men. If mine are to be of no account, His must be of far less account. First of all, because my church, bishops, and sacraments work instanter and help men in this present life, so that they cannot help seeing it, for I am there and help men quickly to what they desire; but Christ's sacraments work for a future and invisible spiritual state, so that His Church and bishops can scarcely be perceived<sup>1</sup> a very little, afar off, and the Holy Ghost acts as though He were not there, lets people suffer all misfortune and makes them appear, in the eyes of my church, as heretics. Meanwhile, not only is my church so close that a man can actually grasp it, but my works follow quickly; and so

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<sup>1</sup>Luther says "smelled."

everyone thinks that it is the true Church of God. This is the advantage that I have."

That is how things have gone. When we began to teach, by the Gospel, that these outward things could not save men, because they were mere natural, created things and the devil often used them as spells, then people,—even great and learned people—came to the conclusion that baptism because it was external water, the Word because it was outward, human speech, the Scriptures because they were outward letters, made with ink, bread and wine because baked by the baker,—that all these things were nothing at all, because they were external, perishable things. Thus they devised the slogan, "Spirit! Spirit! The Spirit must do it! The letter killeth." Thus Münzer<sup>1</sup> called us Wittenberg theologians men learned in the Scriptures and himself the man taught of the Spirit<sup>2</sup>; and many others followed his example. There you see how the devil had armed himself and built up his barricades! If his external doctrine and sacraments (which bring quick, visible, mighty aid) were attacked, then Christ's external sacraments and words (which are slow with their aid, or bring aid that is invisible and weak) must go to far worse destruction along with them.

Therefore the Ecclesia, the holy Christian people, has mere outward words, sacraments, and offices, such as God's imitator, Satan, has and has in far greater number; but it has these things commanded, instituted, and ordained by God, so that He Himself, and not any angel, will work through them with the Holy Ghost. They are called the Word, baptism, Sacrament, and forgiving-office not of angels, or of men, or of creatures, but of God Himself; only it is His will to act for the comfort and good of us poor, weak, feeble men through them, and not through His unveiled, evident, bright majesty. For who could bear that for an instant in this sinful, poor flesh, as Moses says, *Non videbit me homo et vivet?*<sup>3</sup> Thus the Jews could not endure even the shoes of His feet on Mount Sinai,

Exod.  
33:20

<sup>1</sup>The reference is to his *Schutzrede und antwort* (1524).

<sup>2</sup>*Uns die Schriftgelerten und sich den Geistgelerten.*

<sup>3</sup>"No man shall see me and live."



that is, in the thunder and the clouds, and how would they have endured, with such feeble eyes, the sun of His divine majesty and the clear light of His countenance? But He wills to do these things by tolerable, sober, pleasant means, which could not be better chosen by ourselves; as, for example, by a good, kindly man, who talks with us, preaches to us, lays his hands upon us, forgives our sins, baptizes us, gives us bread and wine to eat and drink. Who can be terrified at such tender ways of acting and not rather rejoice in them with all his heart?

Well, then, that is just what is done for us feeble men, and in it we see how God treats us like dear children, and is not willing—though He has the right,—to deal with us in majesty; and yet, beneath it all, He is using His majestic divine works, might and power, forgiving sin, cleansing from sin, taking away death, bestowing grace and everlasting life. These things are not found in the devil's sacraments and church. There no one can say, "God commanded it, ordered it, instituted it, founded it, and He will Himself be there and do everything." On the contrary, one must then say, "God did not command it, but forbade it; men have invented it, or rather the imitator of God<sup>1</sup> has invented it and leads the people astray with it." He produces no effects that are not temporal, or if they are spiritual, they are sheer deception. He cannot forgive men's sins eternally and save them, as he lyingly says, by means of holy water, masses, and the monastic life; though, to be sure, he can restore to a cow the milk that he has first stolen from her by means of his prophetesses and priestesses,<sup>2</sup> whom Christians call "devil's harlots," and who, when they are discovered, are burned to death with fire, as is right, not for milk-stealing, but for blasphemy, because they strengthen the devil, with his sacraments and churches, against Christ.

In a word, if God were to bid you pick up a straw or pull out a feather, with the command, order, and promise that thereby you should have forgiveness of all your sins, grace, and everlasting life, ought you not accept that, and love and praise it, with all joy and thankfulness, and consider that

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<sup>1</sup> *Der Gottes Affe*, i.e., Satan.

<sup>2</sup> Witches. On "milk-stealing" cf. above, p. 290.

straw and feather as a higher and holier possession than heaven and earth, and love it more than them? For however small the straw or feather is, you get by it such a possession as neither heaven nor earth,—nay, not all the angels,—can give you. Why are we such shameful folk that we do not consider the water of baptism, the bread and wine,—that is, Christ's body and blood,—the spoken Word, and the laying-on of a man's hands for the forgiveness of sins to be as holy a possession<sup>1</sup> as we would think such a straw or feather to be? And yet, in these things, as we see and hear, God Himself wills to work and they are to be His water, word, hand, bread, and wine, whereby it is His will to make us holy and give us life in Christ, who has obtained these things for us and for this work has given us, from the Father, the Holy Ghost.

On the other hand, even though you were to go to Compostella<sup>2</sup> to St. James or let yourself be killed by the severe life of the Carthusians, Franciscans, or Dominicans in order to be saved, and God had not bidden this or instituted it; what good would it do you? He knows nothing about these things, but you and the devil have thought them up, like the special sacraments and the classes of priests. Even though you were able to carry heaven and earth on your shoulders in order to be saved, it would be labor lost, and he who picked up the straw (if it were commanded) would do more than you, though you could carry ten worlds. Why so? It is God's will that we shall obey His Word, use His sacraments, honor His Church; then He will act graciously and tenderly enough, even more graciously and tenderly than we could desire; for it is said, "I am thy God; thou shalt have no other gods"; and it is said again, "Him shalt thou hear, and no other."

That is enough to say about the Church. Nothing more can be said about it, except that each section could be developed further. The rest must deal with another subject,<sup>3</sup> of which we shall also speak.

Exod.  
20:21

Matt.  
17:5

<sup>1</sup> So hoch Heilthum.

<sup>2</sup> The shrine of St. James at Compostella, in Spain; a famous place of pilgrimage. Cf. Vol. I, p. 191, n. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Muscine andere Meinung haben.

Beside these external marks and holy possessions<sup>1</sup> the Church has still other external customs. It is not made holy by them or through them, either in body or soul; they are not instituted or commanded by God; and yet, as has been said of them at length above, they are of great necessity and usefulness, and are fine and proper. Such customs are the keeping of certain holidays and of certain hours, before or after noon, as times for preaching and prayer, and the use of church buildings, or houses, altars, pulpits, fonts, lights, candles, bells, vestments and the like. These things have no other effect and do nothing else than lies in their nature, just as foods do nothing more because of the *benedicite* and the *gratias*<sup>2</sup> of the children; for the godless and the rude folk, who say no *benedicite* or *gratias*, that is, who neither pray to God nor thank Him, get as fat and strong from their eating and drinking as do Christians. Christians can become and remain holy without these things, if the preaching is done on the street, without a pulpit, if sins are forgiven,<sup>3</sup> if the Sacrament is administered without an altar, baptism without a font; and indeed it is of daily occurrence that, because of peculiar circumstances, sermons are preached and baptism and the Sacrament administered in homes. But for the sake of the children and the simple folk, it is a fine thing and promotes good order to have a definite time, place, and hour for these things, so that people can adapt themselves and meet together, as St. Paul says, in I Corinthians xiv, "Let all be done in fine order." This order no one ought, and no Christian does, despise without cause, out of mere pride, and only for the sake of creating disorder; but for the sake of the multitude everyone ought to join in observing it, or at least not disturb or hinder it. That would be to act against love and kindness.

Customs  
and  
Rites

I Cor.  
14: 40

Nevertheless, these things ought to remain free. If from necessity, or for some other good reason, we cannot preach at six or seven or twelve or one o'clock, on Sunday or Monday, in the choir or at St. Peter's, then let the preaching be

<sup>1</sup> *Heilthum*.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., The grace which the children say at table.

<sup>3</sup> i.e., The absolution pronounced.

done at other hours, on other days, in other places, so long as the common people are not disturbed by such a change, but are carried along in it. For these things are entirely external and, so far as times and places and persons are concerned, they can be regulated altogether by reason and are completely subject to it. God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost ask no questions about these things, any more than they ask about what or where we eat, drink, dress, live, marry, go, or stay; except as has been said, that no one ought, without good reason, to take these matters into his own hands and disturb or hinder the common people. At a wedding or other social gathering no one ought to annoy the bride or the rest of the guests by peculiar or disturbing conduct, but rather behave as the rest do, and sit and walk and stand and dance and eat and drink with them. It is not possible to place a special table, kitchen, cellar, and servant at every individual's disposal. If one needs anything, let him get up from the table and leave the others to sit there in peace. So in these matters, too, everything should be done peacefully and in order and yet it should all be free and subject to change, if times and persons or other circumstances demand; then the crowd follows along harmoniously. For, as has been said, these things make no Christian either more holy or more unholy.

To be sure, the pope has scrawled the world full of books about these things and has made of them bonds, laws, rights, articles of faith, sin, and holiness, and it would be right to burn his decrees again in the fire.<sup>1</sup> For this book, which has done great harm, could well be spared. It has pushed the Holy Scriptures under the bench and severely suppressed Christian doctrine; it has brought the jurists also into subjection with their imperial law; thus it has trodden both Church and emperor under foot, and has given us in their place the stupid asses of canonists, the will-o'-the-wisps, who have ruled the Church by it,<sup>2</sup> and what is more lamentable, have left the best that is in it and taken out the worst, and forced that upon the Church. What good there is in it could

<sup>1</sup> Luther had burned copies of the Canon Law along with the bull of excommunication, Dec 10, 1520.

<sup>2</sup> i.e., By the Canon Law.

be had much better in Holy Scripture, nay, in St. Augustine alone, so far as the doctrine of the Church is concerned, and in the jurists, so far as temporal government is concerned. The jurists themselves once had the intention to throw this book out of jurisprudence and leave it to the theologians, but it would be better to throw it in the fire and reduce it to ashes, though there is some good in it; for how could pure evil exist, unless there were some good among it? But there is so much of the evil that it takes the place which the good ought to have, and (as has been said) the good is found more richly in the Scriptures, and even in the fathers and the jurists. Unless, of course, one were to keep it in the libraries as an evidence of the folly and the mistakes of popes and some of the councils and other teachers! That is what I keep it for.

These outward, free things we should regard as the baptismal shirt or cloth in which a child is wrapped for baptism. The child is not baptized or made holy by the shirt or cloth, but by the baptism, and yet reason tells us to wrap it in the cloth. If the cloth is soiled or torn, we take something else, and wash the child without the aid of cloth or shirt; only we must observe moderation and not take too many shirts or cloths, so that the child is smothered. Thus in ceremonies also there should be moderation, so that they do not become a burden and a task, but remain so light that they are not felt, just as at a wedding no one thinks it a burden or a task to act and conduct himself like other people. Of the special fasts I shall write again when I write about that plague of the Germans, gluttony and drunkenness; for this belongs properly to temporal government.

Of the schools<sup>1</sup> I have written much above and elsewhere, urging firmness and diligence in caring for them. Although they may be regarded as a heathen, external thing, because the boys learn in them the languages and arts, nevertheless they are highly necessary. If we do not train pupils, we shall not long have pastors and preachers, as we are finding out. The school must give the Church persons who can be made apostles, evangelists, and prophets, that is, preachers,

The  
Schools

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<sup>1</sup> See Vol. IV, 103ff and 135ff.

pastors, rulers, beside the other kinds of people that are needed throughout the world, who are to become chancelors, councillors, secretaries, and the like, and who help with worldly government. Moreover, if the school-master is a god-fearing man and teaches the boys to understand, to sing and to practice God's Word and the true faith, and holds them to Christian discipline, then (as was said above) the schools are young and everlasting councils, which do more good than many great councils. Therefore the former emperors, kings and princes did well when, with such diligence, they built so many schools, high and low, cloisters and endowed houses, because they wanted to provide the Church with a rich and great supply of persons; but their descendants have shamefully perverted and misused them. Therefore princes and lords ought now to do as their predecessors did, and turn the possessions of the cloisters over to the schools and endow many persons with means to study. Even though our descendants abuse them, we have done our part in our time.

The  
Family  
and the  
State

Ps.  
127:1

In a word, the school must be the next thing to the Church, for it is the place where young pastors and preachers are trained and out of which they are drawn to put in the places of those who die. Next to the school comes the burgher's house, out of which pupils are got. After them come the town-hall and the castle, which must protect the burghers, so that they produce children for the schools, and the schools, so that they train children to be pastors, and then the pastors can, in turn, make churches and children of God, whether the people be burghers, princes, or emperors. God, however, must be over all and nearest of all, to preserve this ring, or circle, against the devil, and to do all, in all classes, nay, in all creatures. Psalm cxxvii says that there are on earth only two bodily governments, the city and the house. It says, "Except the Lord build the house," and again, "Except the Lord keep the city." The first government is that of the house, out of which come people. The second is the ruling of the city, that is, lands, people, princes, and lords, which we call worldly government. There everything is given,—children, property, money, beasts, etc. The house must build

this; the city must guard, protect, and defend it. Then comes the third thing, God's own house and city, that is, the Church, which must have people from the house and protection and defense from the city.

These are the three hierarchies ordained by God, and we need no more; indeed we have enough and more than enough to do in living aright and resisting the devil in these three. Look only at the house and see what is to do there. There are parents and house-rulers to obey; there are children and servants to support, train, govern, and care for in a godly way. We would have enough to do to keep the law of the home, even if there were nothing else to do. Then the city, that is, the worldly government, also gives us enough to do, if we are, on the one hand, to be faithful in our obedience and, on the other, to judge, protect, and further the good of our subjects, lands and people. The devil keeps us busy enough, and with him God has given us the sweat of our brows and plenty of thorns and thistles, so that in these two kinds of law<sup>1</sup> we have a rich abundance of things to learn, to live, to do, and to endure. Then there is, after these, the third kind of law and government. If the Holy Ghost rules, Christ calls it a comfortable, sweet, easy burden; if not, it is not only heavy, sour, and terrible, but it is also impossible, as Paul calls it in Romans viii, *Impossible legis*,<sup>2</sup> and says in another place, "The letter killeth."

Gen.  
3:18

Matt.  
11:30  
Rom. 8:3  
II Cor.  
3:6

Now why should we have, over and above these three divine governments, these three divine, natural, temporal laws, the blasphemous, pretended law or government of the pope? It would be everything, yet it is nothing. On the contrary, it leads us astray and tears us away from these blessed, divine estates and laws. Instead it puts a mask or cowl upon us and makes us the devil's fools and puppets, who live in idleness and no longer know these three divine hierarchies or laws. Therefore we will endure it no longer, but act according to the teaching of Sts. Peter and Paul and Augustine, and turn against them the second Psalm, "Let us tear their bands asunder and cast away their cords from

Ps. 2:2

<sup>1</sup> i.e., The law of the home and the law of the State.

<sup>2</sup> "That which is impossible to the law."

- Gal. 1:8 us." Nay, we will sing with St. Paul, "He that teacheth otherwise, even though he were an angel from heaven, let him be accursed!" We will say with St. Peter, "Why do ye tempt God by the imposing of such a burden?" Thus we will again be lords of the pope and tread him under foot, as
- Ps. Psalm xci says, "Thou shalt tread upon the adder and basilisk, and the lion and dragon shalt thou trample under foot."
- 91:13
- Gen. This we will do by the power and help of the woman's Seed, 3:15 Who hath trodden and still treads upon the serpent's head, even though we must take the risk that he will bite us in the heel. To that blessed Seed of the woman be praise and honor, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one true God, forever. **A m e n .**



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